

# Children's Access to Play in Schools

# The Play-friendly School Label

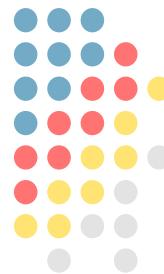
A Handbook for Schools



Funded by the  
Erasmus+ programme  
of the European Union



## Document Control



<b>Reference:</b>	Children's Access to Play in School (CAPS)
<b>Activity:</b>	IO3 – Handbook
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<b>Date:</b>	01-08-2019
<b>ISBN:</b>	978-1-86174-261-2

Disclaimer: This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.  
Grant Agreement No. 2017-1-UK01-KA201-036679

### Acknowledgements:



*Thank you to Michel Follett founder of Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL), for his advisory role within the CAPS project and support material for this handbook.*



*Thank you to Bob Hughes (PlayEducation) for permission to use the lists in Chapter 6, section 6.5*

The Play-friendly Schools Handbook has been produced through the work of the European ‘Children’s Access to Play’ Project (CAPS). CAPS, a 3-year Erasmus Plus funded project (2017-2020) in the UK, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Austria aimed to support schools to become more play-friendly. Project partners are:



Palacký University  
Olomouc



**University of Gloucestershire**

United Kingdom

[www.glos.ac.uk](http://www.glos.ac.uk)

**Rogers Foundation for Person-Centred Education**

Hungary

[www.rogersalapitvany.hu](http://www.rogersalapitvany.hu)

**Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und Bildung**

Austria

<http://www.gesob.at>

**Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Physical Culture**

Czech Republic

<http://www.upol.cz/>

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**TANDEM n.o.**

Slovakia

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# Chapter One: Introduction to the handbook

## 1.1 What is the Play-friendly Schools handbook?

The Play-friendly Schools handbook has been produced through the work of the European ‘Children’s Access to Play’ Project (CAPS). CAPS, a 3-year Erasmus Plus-funded project (2017-2020) in the UK, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Austria aimed to support schools to become more play-friendly. The project was a transfer of knowledge of two UK concepts:

- playwork, an approach to working with children to create and maintain spaces where they can play<sup>1</sup>, and
- the UK-based OPAL programme (Outdoor Play and Learning)<sup>2</sup>, a mentor supported school improvement programme.

The project developed quality criteria to assist schools to work towards a Play-friendly School Label and a training course for school staff with accompanying learning resources including this handbook, the information here refers mainly to primary schools, although aspects of it may be useful for kindergarten, nursery and for older children.

The main purpose of this handbook is to support schools who want to go through the process of becoming a Play-friendly School. It presents each of the Quality Criteria and offers background information, research evidence, conceptual and practical tools for schools to use. **It should be used in conjunction with the Quality Criteria document<sup>3</sup>**, which gives more detail on the indicators and make suggestions for evidence.

It is intended that the Play-friendly Schools handbook will be a useful reference document for those already facilitating play within their school but will provide also both inspiration and practical information for those who wish to get things started and to enhance what they are already doing. There is much to celebrate and acknowledge in the variety and quality of what has already been achieved in providing play opportunities for children within schools. However, it is undeniable that there are more pressures facing children today and schools are well-positioned to harness the opportunity to bring better play opportunities to children’s lives, making their time at school happier and more fulfilling.

The handbook can also be used as a resource in the delivery of the Play-friendly Schools course. Section 8 includes a mapping of the handbook contents to the modules of the training course. It contains information that reflects new research and developments and a range of information about new and current school projects and initiatives, including the work of OPAL. Information for the handbook has been drawn from a wide variety of sources from within the Children’s Access to Play European network and beyond; where there are identifiable sources these have been acknowledged

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.playengland.org.uk/playwork-2/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> CAPS Quality Criteria: A Play-friendly School Label - <http://www.playfriendlyschools.eu/copy-of-the-quality-criteria>

in the text. This handbook includes information and ideas for practitioners across Europe and beyond. Further information can be found on the website [www.playfriendlyschools.eu](http://www.playfriendlyschools.eu).

## 1.2 Why being a Play-friendly School matters

Play is in the core of a child's life. Play researchers suggest that play is children's default setting, their way of engaging with the world. It can contribute to the development of resilient capacities such as how children regulate their emotions and cope when under stress as well as enabling them to build strong relationships with peers and staff and be open to learning. Peter Blatchford, professor of psychology and education at University College London Institute of Education, UK, has been studying break times since 1995. He says:

Interactions and relationships between children are important. The way they maintain attention on an activity, develop friendships, loyalty and trust, and deal with conflict, these are all skills that they need to learn in order to learn effectively in the classroom and work as a team member. They need unstructured play time in order to do this, and breaktimes provide an opportunity for spontaneous social behaviour in children's play.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, play's great contribution to life is its vitality and the pleasure it brings. This is more than a luxury, it gives us all a greater satisfaction in being alive. Children who can find time and space to play are more likely to be happier, more settled and more engaged in other aspects of school life. Aside from the wellbeing benefits the pupils gain from quality play opportunities within the school day, from the perspective of the school, we know that where schools have the conditions right in supporting play, they see a significant decline in behaviour issues and reported accidents, saving hours of teacher time and money in resolving these.

Our friends at OPAL tell us that in the UK, children spend on average 20% of their time (1.4 years of the primary school lives, or a day a week) in non-lesson time (potentially play time). Given this, it is certainly worth considering deeply how that time is used. Their experience of working with schools and reaching over 500,000 children shows that in schools that have gone through the OPAL process

- children enjoy play times more;
- they return to learning more readily – teachers report up to 20 minutes extra teaching time after breaks;
- there is better engagement in learning;
- staff-pupil relationships are better;
- there are fewer behavioural issues;
- children seek less help with incidents and accidents;
- there is a reduction in accidents because there is less aimless running around;
- children are physically active;
- improved physical activity/literacy;
- children engage in a wide range of play forms with each other, often with children they did not mix with before;
- school generally is a happier place to be.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Peter Blatchford in TES, July 2018:

[https://england.magazine.tes.com/editions/edition\\_edition\\_edition\\_5310.england/data/383715/index.html](https://england.magazine.tes.com/editions/edition_edition_edition_5310.england/data/383715/index.html)

Generally speaking, children are happy, settled, in good mental and physical health and open to learning. In other words, making time and space for play in the school day **helps rather than hinders** children's education.

Besides being a good thing to do to support the overall happiness and wellbeing of children and of the school, good play opportunities are also something to take seriously from the perspective of children's rights. **Article 31** of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) says that children and young people have the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. In 2013, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child published General Comment 17 on article 31, an official statement aimed at national governments that elaborates the meaning of the article, emphasises its importance and gives guidance on governments' accountability in implementing it. The General Comment states that article 31 rights are

fundamental to the quality of childhood, to children's entitlement to optimum development, to the promotion of resilience, and to the realisation of other rights ... Play and recreation are essential to the health and well-being of children and promote the development of creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and physical, social cognitive and emotional strength and skills. They contribute to all aspects of learning. They are a form of participation in everyday life, and are of intrinsic value to the child, purely in terms of the enjoyment and pleasure they afford.

In outlining governments' responsibility for recognising, respecting and promoting article 31 rights, the General Comment specifically states that schools have a major role to play, including through the provision of outdoor and indoor spaces that afford opportunities for all forms of playing and for all children, and that the structure of the school day should allow **sufficient time and space** for play.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.3 The playwork ethos

In the UK, there is a profession called Playwork that involves the creation and maintenance of spaces for children to play. Playwork is also the support given by adults in an unobtrusive way to support children's play. Playworkers assist a child if needed but strive to be as inconspicuous as possible to allow the children to self-direct their play. A skilled playworker is capable of enriching the child's play experience both in terms of the design and resourcing of the physical environment and the attitudes and culture within the setting.

Playwork has its origins in Europe, when during and after World War II, children were observed playing in the rubble of bombed out areas climbing in the debris and building dens and play things out of found materials. Lady Allen of Hurtwood was influenced by a Danish landscape architect, C. Th. Sorenson, who had recognised that children enjoyed playing with loose parts, such as sticks, stones, boxes, ropes, and other non-prescriptive materials, more than the traditional playgrounds he had previously built. He built a new playground in Emdrup, Denmark, in 1943, that he referred to as

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<sup>5</sup> General Comment 17 is discussed in a bit more detail in Chapter 5 of this handbook. You can find a summary of it in English here: [http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/IPA-Summary-of-UN-GC-article-31\\_FINAL1.pdf](http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/IPA-Summary-of-UN-GC-article-31_FINAL1.pdf) and full texts here: <http://ipaworld.org/childs-right-to-play/article-31/general-comment-17/>

a “junk playground,” a place where children could create and build whatever their imagination allowed. Lady Allen brought this playground concept to England and renamed them adventure playgrounds. They were staffed by adults whose role was to source materials and generally support but not direct what children did. Although adults had worked to support children’s play prior to this, the adventure playground movement in the UK is seen as the foundation for today’s playwork ethos.

In the UK today, there are a number of settings where playwork takes place including holiday playschemes, adventure playgrounds, hospital play rooms, out of school clubs and outreach playwork projects where playworkers work in parks and on mobile play bus projects. The thing that is common across these very different settings is a strong reference to the UK playwork ethos, which is contained within eight guiding statements called the Playwork Principles.

These Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and are introduced below. Schools that are striving to be play-friendly would benefit from understanding the playwork ethos; the Playwork Principles have influenced the content of the Play-friendly Schools Quality Criteria, the Trainer’s Guide and this handbook.

### **1.3.1 The Playwork Principles**

The Playwork Principles, 8 in total, provide an ethical framework for the playwork sector. They were written by a scrutiny group of experienced practitioners, trainers and educators in 2005, with extensive consultation with the playwork sector. They have been highly influential in the sector as they set out not only what the sector understands by the term play but also what are the key qualities of the staff who are responsible for creating conditions in which children can play. The Playwork Principles have underpinned qualification and training courses and feature heavily in key documents. The principles set out the need for play professionals to advocate for play when faced with other adult agendas and to develop skills in reflection to ensure when working with children and young people that staff provide the right permissions and support to enable children the freedom to play. In essence, the principles set out what is unique about and to be cherished when working to support children’s play.

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities.
2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.
3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up-to-date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.

7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

A video titled The Playwork Principles – “why we do what we do” can be viewed here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VGq83IPNn8><sup>6</sup>

## **1.4 Overview of the contents within the handbook**

### **Chapter 2, Play in schools**

This chapter provides policy and practice related information on play and schools in each of our partner countries that we think will be useful for those who are considering becoming a play-friendly school. It also gives a brief overview of international organisations working to support play in schools.

### **Chapter 3, Quality Criterion 1: the school has the leadership structure that supports children's play**

This chapter highlights why it is important to have people in leadership positions that can support both the strategic and operational aspects of becoming and staying a Play-friendly School. It also considers the importance of bringing a whole-school approach to the process.

### **Chapter 4, Quality Criterion 2: the school has a written statement on how it supports play**

This chapter considers in some detail the process of drawing up the written statement that a Play-friendly School needs to develop and what should be in it. It then introduces some theories of children's play and also looks at the importance of access to time and space for play and the topic of risk in play.

### **Chapter 5: Quality Criterion 3: children have sufficient time for play**

This chapter opens with looking at what the UNCRC's General Comment on article 31 has to say about schools making sufficient time for play in the school day. It goes on to discuss the importance of extended times for play and the importance of honouring times for play before looking at playful pedagogies and value of acknowledging moments of playfulness throughout the school day.

### **Chapter 6: Quality Criterion 4: children have sufficient space for playing**

This chapter introduces some of the theories of space that underpin approaches to auditing spaces for playing and ways of documenting how the space works. It introduces the idea that space is produced rather than merely being a neutral container. It then introduces the idea of affordances and the theory of loose parts. Two approaches to auditing and mapping the space are offered, and these will be helpful in producing evidence for how the school meets the Quality Criteria. It closes with ideas on what we already know about designing a rich play environment.

### **Chapter 7: Quality Criterion 5: the school culture supports children's play**

This chapter revisits the importance of a whole-school approach and an overall playful feel. It then

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<sup>6</sup> VIPER - 'Volunteers in Playwork - Employment Routes' project (2013-2015)

considers in more detail a playwork approach to working with children at play times, particularly ideas of intervention and adulteration and the tensions these concepts can create.

### **Chapter 8: Useful resources**

This chapter provides a list of resources found throughout the handbook as well as a comprehensive list of references used.

Whilst it is possible to use this handbook as a stand-alone resource to enable schools to sign up to the Play-friendly Schools Label, there is no substitute for professional participative training for staff involved in supporting play within schools - see our website for more details of training in your country<sup>7</sup>. Also, each school setting is different and the opportunities and issues are specific to its place and people. Activities, resources, policies and guidelines need to be put into the context of the overall vision and practice of your particular school. Use and adapt what is useful here and follow up signposts for further sources of information, but do things your way...

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<sup>7</sup> <http://playfriendlyschools.eu/>

## Chapter 2: Play in Schools

This chapter provides information on play and schools in each of our partner countries that we think will be useful for those who are considering becoming a Play-friendly School. On an international level, there is growing interest in the role of play in schools and also in the role of the outdoors. Two examples are given here:

- The International School Grounds Alliance (ISGA) is a global network of organisations and professionals working to enrich children's learning and play by improving the way school grounds are designed and used.<sup>8</sup>
- Global Outdoor Classroom Day: a global campaign to celebrate and inspire outdoor learning and play. On the day, thousands of schools around the world take lessons outdoors and prioritise playtime. In 2018, over 3.5 million children in over 100 countries took part.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1 Austria

Play fits easily into the Austrian school day. In primary schools for example, it is a fixed part of the curriculum. Especially in 'All-Day-Schools', there is a need to organise leisure time. This relates mainly to primary schools but is also applicable in the lower secondary schools.

In the elementary school curriculum, learning in play is the first of the recommended forms of learning. Playing is thus an important building block for the connectivity of educational processes in the transition to the school system. Based on the more play-oriented forms of learning used in pre-school, the children are guided to conscious, independent, goal-oriented learning. In lesson planning, an appropriate time frame should already be provided for free learning and play during the annual planning phase.

In the educational context for many schools, there is the opportunity for the promotion of self-determined and free play. In the private sector, the school focus and framework conditions can be defined by the individual institutions of the schools themselves, as long as the attainment of the learning objectives for the respective school levels is generally ensured. As far as school autonomy is concerned, school administrators in the public sector also have the opportunity to create good framework conditions for play.

The central questions for play in everyday school life can be formulated as follows:

What makes it so difficult for adults to allow children freely chosen play? Have we forgotten our own childhood, the joy of playing? Both are connected to each other: How do children prepare for life?

Pedagogue Rebeca Wild says:

If we look at children with their speed, with their need for relationships, with their need for time, for free-floating time, ritualized time, for sensuality, for simple immediate experiences - then it

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.internationalschoolgrounds.org/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://outdoorclassroomday.com/>

becomes clear to us that we have created a world that is better for the big ones than for the small ones.

A common argument of ambitious parents is the assumption that ‘the children would play far too much’. Admittedly, they are creative, happy, have initiative and great social skills, but at some point they have to stop playing. After all, they have to learn to sit still, to listen and also to do what they are not interested in. How else are they supposed to find a place in society?<sup>10</sup>

Fred Donaldson, who is intensively involved with ‘Original Play’,<sup>11</sup> describes his path as follows:

After a while I gave up the game to devote myself seriously and productively to academic work. In many school years I had learnt to see the world from a very specific perspective and to grasp it mentally. And without realizing it, I had lost contact with my sense of wonder and belonging to the world. My life is continuously enriched by children and animals who reflect back to me that the positive qualities of childhood are fundamental to life. It is our responsibility to ensure that these qualities are fully developed.<sup>12</sup>

Donaldson is increasingly convinced that the original, the wild is present in children's play. If we are to survive and feel at home in a world that is truly worth living in, we must re-appropriate the natural sense of belonging, innocence and receptivity. He thus conveys both a vision and instructions for action for a life of security, belonging and compassion. The ingredients that enable people to live in peace.

The neurobiologist Gerhard Hüther<sup>13</sup> notes that in a world that is over-regulated by parents and caregivers, the characteristics associated with successful people can be forgotten. These qualities, which should be the expression of maturity at the end of parental upbringing, include autonomy, self-determination, self-responsibility, mastery of risk, imagination and creativity, creative thinking, and spontaneous relationship to people and their being in the world. It is remarkable that children are looking for exactly these qualities and abilities. You have an instinct for the right thing, an intuition for the right food. We should think carefully about how we prize these qualities, and yet we increasingly block children's ability to develop them on their own: the nature that comes to life on its own, the free play in the wilderness, unplanned, uncontrolled time.

The Danish family therapist Jesper Juul<sup>14</sup> stresses that our perception of quality of life and the quality of our relationships with other people depend on whether we take an active personal responsibility or let ourselves be guided entirely by the expectations of other people or by social and cultural conventions. By definition, other people's needs and expectations pose a threat to our personal responsibility. The development of personal responsibility is a fruitful alternative to oppression and humiliation. It represents an essential quality in relationships and is the guarantor for responsible

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<sup>10</sup> Wild, R. (2003) *Freiheit und Grenzen – Liebe und Respekt*, Weinheim, Basel: Beltz Verlag (our own translation).

<sup>11</sup> <https://originalplay.eu/>

<sup>12</sup> Donaldson, F. (2012) *Von Herzen spielen: Die Grundlagen des ursprünglichen Spiels*, Freiamt: Arbor Verlag (our own translation).

<sup>13</sup> Hüther, G. und Renz-Polster, H. (2016) *Wie Kinder heute wachsen, Natur als Entdeckungsraum*, Weinheim, Basel: Beltz Verlag.

<sup>14</sup> Juul, J. und Jensen, H. (2009) *Vom Gehorsam zur Verantwortung. Für eine neue Erziehungskultur*, Weinheim, Basel: Beltz Verlag.

communities.

Play, and the associated development of individual responsibility, is also a protective factor in the prevention of bullying in schools. Early intervention is important to prevent bullying, as the Austrian expert on bullying, Christa Kolodej, determines.

## 2.2 Czech Republic

### 2.2.1 Background:

The Palacký University in Olomouc, represented by the Faculty of Physical Culture, has participated in the three-year international CAPS programme from September 2017. The CAPS follows on from the European (Erasmus+) project 'Volunteers in Play - Employment Routes (VIPER)' 2013-2015, in which Palacký University Olomouc was a partner.

- Since the idea of playwork is not well known in the Czech Republic, we decided to work with ZŠ a MŠ Svatoplukova 11, Olomouc as a pilot school to serve as a good example of good practice. The idea is that the Faculty of Physical Culture UPOL<sup>15</sup> would provide theoretical background and information on training opportunities;
- the Czech pilot school ZŠ and MŠ Svatoplukova 11, Olomouc,<sup>16</sup> would provide an example of good practice.

### 2.2.2 Czech specific application:

- There are **no legal barriers** to implementing the CAPS programme in Czech elementary schools.
- The application of the programme has been aimed mainly at **after-school-clubs** regularly attended by about 80% of children (probably specifics of the Czech educational system). The after-school-clubs are a mandatory part of every elementary school under the same head teacher. Moreover, there is the possibility to share the adapted space for children's free play with preschools. It is common in the Czech Republic for preschools to be connected with primary schools.
- Given the climatic conditions in Czech Republic, there is **a need to adapt not only outdoor space but also indoor space for children's free play** (but see also section 4.4 on accessing outdoor space in all weathers).
- The school must make **changes in the school curriculum and in the after-school-clubs curriculum**. These changes are within the remit of individual schools and head teachers.
- **All school staff need to be familiar with the concept of freely chosen play and to know how to support it.** Parents should also be educated. Before starting the process of becoming a Play-friendly School, at least half of the school staff should be trained. Long-term work with teachers and parents is needed to maintain the sustainability of the project. Look for the opportunities offered the Faculty of Physical Culture UPOL.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://ftk.upol.cz/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.zssvatoplukova.cz/>

- The schools need advice in searching for suitable sources of loose parts - look for the options offered [www.zssvatoplukova.cz](http://www.zssvatoplukova.cz).

### 2.2.3 Study resources

Some Czech language study resources are offered here. Please see Chapter 8 for other (mainly English language) resources.

Klimešová, I., Hoffmannová, J., Šebek, L., & Wittmannová, J. (2019). *Perspektiva svobodně zvolené hry dítěte ve školním prostředí*. Recenzovaná kolektivní monografie (Ed. M. Švamberk Šauerová) Prožitek a zkušenost – edukační fenomén i pro 21. století. Praha, Česká republika: VŠTVS Palestra.

Klimešová, I., & Wittmannová, J. (2016). Play-Way: Podpora dětské hry. *Sborník abstraktů z 3. mezinárodní vědecké konference Zážitková pedagogika „Sport a zážitková pedagogika 2016“*. 18, Praha, Česká republika: VŠTVS Palestra.

Wittmannová, J., & Klimešová, I. (2016). Play-Way: Nechte mě si hrát! *Sborník abstraktů z 3. mezinárodní vědecké konference Zážitková pedagogika „Sport a zážitková pedagogika 2016“*. 37, Praha, Česká republika: VŠTVS Palestra.

Wittmannová, J., & Klimešová, I. (2016). Playway: Nechte mě si hrát. In M. Švamberk Šauerová (Ed.) *Benefity sportovních a prožitkových aktivit v edukačních souvislostech* (pp. 287–289). Praha, Česká republika: VŠTVS Palestra. ISBN 978-80-87723-30-2 (print, ISBN 978-80-87723-31-9 (online)

Wittmannová, J., Klimešová, I., Xaverová, Z. (2015). Playway. Přístup k porozumění a podpoře dětské hry. Sešit účastníka. Olomouc: VUP. ISBN 978-80-244-4012-4.

Wittmannová, J., Klimešová, I., Xaverová, Z. (2015). Playway. Přístup k porozumění a podpoře dětské hry. Sešit lektora. Olomouc: VUP. ISBN 978-80-244-4012-5.

## 2.3 Hungary

In Hungary, there is no “play strategy” that exists on a state / governmental level. Public education is regulated by the Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education<sup>17</sup>, and the National Base Curriculum provides the guidelines to be followed by schools. The Curriculum mentions play several times, but more in the context of its developmental aims, not of the joy of play activities. Free play/playwork is not mentioned at all.

Free play in many cases is highly emphasised in kindergartens, but in most schools playing is only a secondary activity, playful activities usually being delivered by the teacher with some kind of developmental aim. Because of this approach, play pedagogy is usually included in the training of kindergarten teachers, but not of general teachers. One positive example is the ELTE University Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education, which offers a play-mentor further training course for not only kindergarten teachers but general teachers, managers and psychologists as well. This course aims to develop knowledge and methodical experience about play and games, promoting

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<sup>17</sup> Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education -  
[https://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A1100190.TV](https://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1100190.TV)

implementing it in their practice with children aged 6-18. Free play is not specifically mentioned in the programme yet.

The approach of leisure-time pedagogy is also present in Hungary. Some schools put great effort into finding ways to have their students spend their leisure-time in a meaningful way, free play and spontaneity is not often present in this context. Leisure-time is usually organised, with pre-planned programmes (school trips, cultural programmes, complex programmes) or activities with specific developmental goals.

Alongside this, game-based learning and gamification are becoming more and more popular / well-known among schools with a more progressive approach.

As for introducing free play into schools, there are some good opportunities. At primary school level (aged 6-14) a so-called "whole-day education" is in place, which means that children are required to stay in school between 8am and 4pm. In the afternoons, after lessons, schools are free to decide how to use this time, in theory – but practically it is often used for children to do their homework and take part in extra-curricular activities, so basically continue studying. Talking with several teachers about this, we found that apart from the school culture, there is no actual barrier to introducing play sessions in this space.

Some teachers also see an opportunity for introducing play during PE lessons. The public education law requires daily PE lessons, which often causes logistical problems for schools, as there is not enough space for several classes to have their PE lessons running in parallel. This situation sometimes leads to less than ideal solutions, such as using the school stairways for the whole lesson, or teaching about sport theory within a classroom, with children sitting down. Introducing regular play sessions could actually help schools in this regard, as several classes can play together at the same time and in the same space.

## 2.4 Poland

The Polish educational system doesn't have a specific focus or strategy regarding play, but it doesn't mean that play or playful activities don't exist. Many schools make efforts to include certain elements of play as an educational tool during lessons, but activities undertaken during lessons are not frequent. Play is not supported by the school in children's free time, many Polish schools do not organise time during breaks when children can freely choose what to play. It is worth noting, however, that at many universities educating future pedagogues, elements of "playful pedagogies" or "educational pedagogies" are introduced. Students are presented with modern methods of preparing and conducting classes, with an emphasis on an informal learning model focused on the development of children's interests. While young graduate teachers experience these interesting solutions, the teaching staff who have been working in public schools for many years are disillusioned. This is due to a significant overload of school programmes that are not adapted to the requirements of the modern world, and the requirement for students to be taught information that is mostly theoretical. Teachers are also burdened with a huge amount of paperwork, which means that many of them lose motivation and don't want to develop their skills further. Also noteworthy is the way teachers have been treated by the government, which responds arrogantly to their

attempts to improve their own situation and regain due respect in society, resulting in a strike in 2019, in which tens of thousands of schools across Poland took part.

Generally we can say that in primary schools, especially at the lower classes, play is used as a method to engage children better. As they grow up, it is used less and less in the higher classes. Also it is important to note that while in higher education there are many creative approaches taught to future teachers, it depends on the personality of the teacher, their style of work and the approach of the entire institution as to how much of it is actually applied. In some cases, when the institutional environment is supportive, and also the teachers themselves are personally motivated, play is an important method, while in other places it is used much less often.

The school environment and style of work has a big impact on the use of methods with fun elements. Schools that consider play a valuable part of children's development are more likely to use innovative methods and an alternative approach in education.

Break time during school time and after school activities are important in terms of the fun experience. There are many different approaches regarding breaks in practice, ranging from strict, conservative ones, which see breaks mainly as a time to prepare for the next lesson, to more creative ones, where breaks are viewed as an opportunity to actively create conditions for rest, fun and social activity of pupils. Some schools also have specific relaxation areas for pupils. Other schools have longer lunch breaks, during which students can stay outside in the school yard or playground. During this time, they can relax or use sports equipment. Schools also organise additional sports activities for pupils after classes - for which parents have to pay extra.

Poland does not have a history of supporting play and does not recognise its huge impact on children's development. In society, there is still the conviction that playing is a waste of time and is used as a reward after school work has been completed. Such an approach is unfortunately wrong, because in scientific research it has been clearly proven that play greatly raises students' competences, teaches them to solve problems, develops interpersonal competences and gives relaxation and acts as a stress buster, being a key part of children's lives from an early age.

It is therefore necessary to change the approach to play - both on the part of parents, but also teachers and educational authorities, so that fun can come to school and be treated seriously. Some parents are very negative about play and consider it a waste of time. They also believe that children should be learning at this time. Presenting to parents the range of development opportunities offered by play can help change this attitude.

## 2.5 Slovakia

Although it would be fairly easy to say that play doesn't have a particular place in the Slovak school system, such a statement would be oversimplifying the matter. We encounter efforts to include certain participatory and experiential methods using play as an educational tool in the schooling system, some schools support children's play during the breaks and after school, and finally, the formal educational system is traditionally being supplemented by a rich system of free time education. This part of education is characterised by its informality, development of children's and young people's interests and various organised as well as unstructured free-time activities. We can

see that there's a space for play at Slovak schools, but the space isn't given a formal shape, namely when the matter is viewed from the perspective of free unstructured play. The strongest proponents of this system come from the UK.

Playing and a playful approach as experiential methods are more prominent in the lower classes of primary schools, while its use gradually decreases at the higher levels of education. Although playful, creative and experiential approaches in education and teaching are part of the university education for future teachers, not all of them apply them in practice, or they're applied to varying degrees. It depends on the teacher's personality, work style, awareness of the importance and value of this approach, and pedagogical skills. The environment itself and the style of work throughout the school have a major impact on this - schools that use the so-called 'playful' approach have the greatest tendency to use playful methods as they allow innovative or alternative approaches in their education and training.

An important time in the schedule of the school day (when the play can occur in Slovak schools) is during the breaks and after school. Approaches vary - from a strict, conservative approach that views the breaks primarily as a time to prepare for the next lesson, to an approach actively creating conditions for rest, play and socializing pupils and students. In some schools, there are relaxation corners or relaxation zones and classes. Some schools have a system called active breaks during which the pupils and students can play – they can borrow games such as table football, portable basketball baskets, table tennis or jumping rubber, or, especially in good weather, can spend time outside in the school yard, relax or play sports. Also, there are clubrooms in schools that represent a safe area where pupils and students can spend their time after lessons playing and taking part in activities they organize themselves. Some schools also allow pupils and students to use the school yard for play, sport and leisure activities that they organize after school.

Slovakia has a rich history of leisure-time education, mainly provided by schools, other facilities in the education system (e.g. leisure time and hobby centres, school centres for leisure activities, primary art schools, etc.) and civil society organisations (non-governmental non-profit organisations). The greatest space for free and unstructured play after school is the time spent by some first-grade pupils in after school clubs. Relaxation, recuperation, play, interest activities are the main content of their mission and activities. These activities take place both in clubrooms and in the school garden area. In addition, schools also offer older pupils and students various clubs and leisure activities, where games or a playful approach form the guiding principle.

In spite of this perceived positive shift in support of children's play at Slovak schools, the prevailing approach says that school is a place of education and training, where there is a relatively strict schedule, order and hierarchy into which free, unstructured and uncontrolled play does not belong and fit. However, the situation is gradually improving and changing thanks to the deployment of enlightened and active principals, teachers and sometimes founders of schools/municipalities, parents, or children and young people - especially through school-based school councils representing school pupils' interests.

Last but not least, this situation is positively influenced by various innovative or alternative approaches to schooling, education, learning and school management. Recently, scientific advances in neurobiology - the greater understanding of how the brains of children and young people learn, their natural developmental needs, and how to help them fulfill their needs are the drivers of

positive change. Play, movement and nature are powerful supporters of the development and progress of children and young people in this respect, so we believe that these positive examples will gradually increase.

## 2.6 United Kingdom

In 2019, the 'Playtime Matters' report<sup>18</sup> highlighted that in the UK, 'just over half (51%) of primary classes surveyed have the recommended 60 minutes or more of outdoor playtime/recess every day. A worrying 1 in 6 (16%) have less than 30 minutes. Clearly the UK has some way to go to tackle the decline of time spent playing during the school day. In terms of the quality of that time spent during playtime in schools in the UK, there have been a number of initiatives that have brought positive changes over the past 12 years. Some of these are introduced here.'

### 2.6.1 Loose Parts Play

In England the BIG Lottery Playful Ideas Programme launched with £16 million in 2006, and this programme enabled the playworker sector to add value and influence other sectors including schools. For example, the Scrapstore Play Pod project<sup>19</sup> introduced loose parts into school playgrounds on a regular basis. Loose parts are materials such as cardboard tubes, tyres, lengths of material, netting, ropes, crates and bins which extend the choices and possibilities of play for all children. The non-prescriptive nature of these materials means that children can use the items in endless different ways, enabling all ages, genders and abilities to find ways to play and socialise together.<sup>20</sup> The loose parts are stored in shipping containers or sheds and schools are supported to introduce the play opportunity through a training course and mentoring. The work has now spread to 307 primary schools and early years settings since 2007, ranging from Cornwall to the Orkney Islands, enabling 73,536 children to access loose parts play and quality playtime experiences. The project has inspired the development of other similar models. One example is East Lothian's Loose Part Play project in Scotland.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.6.2 Outdoor Play and Learning

Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) has worked with over 300 schools in the UK and abroad. It is a mentor supported school improvement programme, working over an 18-month period to support an entire cultural and practical transformation of the way that play is thought about, planned for, resourced and staffed. The development of the Play-friendly Schools Quality Criteria has been informed by OPAL's work, and the founder, Michael Follett, has been an adviser to the project.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.6.3 Taking Outdoor Play Seriously (TOPS)

Play Board Northern Ireland, the NGO supporting children's play in Northern Ireland, have introduced the TOPS awards for schools. TOPS is a 'systematic process for reviewing and improving the quality of children's play experiences. It aims to support primary schools to continue the process

<sup>18</sup> Prisk, C. (2019) *Playtime Matters*, London: Semble, <https://outdoorclassroomday.org.uk/resource/playtime-matters-report/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.playpods.co.uk>

<sup>20</sup> The idea of 'loose parts', based on the work of artist Simon Nicholson, is introduced in more detail in Chapter 6

<sup>21</sup> <http://elpa.org.uk/loose-parts-play/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk/>

of deepening staff knowledge and expertise with the objective of creating the right practice and environment in which children can play freely and develop'.<sup>23</sup>

#### **2.6.4 Use of School Grounds for Playing out of Teaching Hours**

In 2010, the Welsh Government introduced a Play Sufficiency Duty as part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. This places a statutory duty on local authorities to assess and secure (as far as is reasonably practicable) sufficient play opportunities for children. As part of their work in supporting the Play Sufficiency Duty<sup>24</sup>, Play Wales, the NGO supporting children's play in Wales, have produced a toolkit to support head teachers, governors and local organisations to work together to consider making school grounds available to local children out of teaching hours<sup>25</sup>.

There is a wealth of publications on the websites of Play England<sup>26</sup>, Play Wales, Play Scotland<sup>27</sup> and Play Board Northern Ireland<sup>28</sup> for any schools/ play settings wishing to read up and research children's play.

#### **2.6.5 Horizon scanning: future developments in UK**

Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, has just introduced a new inspection framework to be implemented in September 2019. Amanda Spielman, Chief Inspector of Schools, said schools should feel empowered to 'put the child first' and will be rewarded 'for doing the right thing by their pupils'. This is a welcome shift from a focus on academic achievement at the expense of a more rounded school experience. The new framework has five categories (quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development, leadership and management). OPAL<sup>29</sup> have shown (in the table below) how improving school play times can help schools meet three of these categories:



<sup>23</sup> <https://www.playboard.org/tops-award-2018-limavady-central-primary-school/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/sufficiency>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.playengland.org.uk/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.playscotland.org/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.playboard.org/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk/the-opal-primary-programme/>

## 2.6.6 Risk and Play

The UK has begun to take steps to move away from being a highly risk averse society, but there is still a long way to go. Ofsted's Amanda Spielman highlighted what she felt were schools' excessive risk aversion, describing as 'simply barmy'<sup>30</sup> measures like sending school children out on city field trips in high-visibility jackets. In 2018 she announced that Ofsted's inspectors would undergo training that would encompass the positive, as well as the negative, side of risk.

Inspections will creep into being a bit more risk-averse unless we explicitly train them to get a more sophisticated understanding of the balance between benefits and risk, and stand back, and say 'It's O.K. to have some risk of children falling over and bashing into things' ... That's not the same as being reckless and sending a 2-year-old to walk on the edge of a 200-foot cliff unaccompanied.

Amanda Spielman's comments recognise that the UK joins a growing number of countries where educators as well as some government agencies think that risk aversion and litigation have gone too far. Clarification on play and risk were set out in guidelines from the Health and Safety executive in a useful guide<sup>31</sup> in 2012. 'Managing Risk in Play Provision'<sup>32</sup> (2012) is a valuable document aimed at those responsible for any play provision to adopt:

an approach to risk management that takes into account the benefits the provision offers to children and young people as well as the risks. It aims to help providers achieve two objectives that are fundamental in any play provision: to offer children and young people challenging, exciting, engaging play opportunities, while ensuring that they are not exposed to unacceptable risk of harm.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/ofsteds-chief-inspector-writes-about-safety-culture-in-schools>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childs-play-statement.htm>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/172644/managing-risk-in-play-provision.pdf>

## Chapter 3: Quality Criterion 1 - The school has a leadership structure that supports children's play

### Quality Criterion 1 - The school has a leadership structure that supports children's play

- 1.1 We have someone responsible for leading on strategic changes to improve and sustain the quality of children's play at school
- 1.2 We have someone responsible for leading on actions to improve and sustain the quality of children's play at school

The experience of working with schools in the UK to improve play times for children has shown that the single most important factor in the success and sustainability of change is effective leadership across both policy and practice. The change towards a Play-friendly School will not always be easy and may take considerable time; it needs strong leadership that can garner support from and work with children, staff, parents and wider stakeholders. The school needs someone who can lead and sustain strategic change and someone who can lead on the operations side of things.

#### 3.1 The importance of having both a strategy and an operations lead

While school structure can be different across schools and countries, there will still be people working with strategy and working with operation. In some schools the headteacher or school director is responsible for both, but often a vice-director, or a senior teacher is responsible for helping her/him in these roles.

First, it is important to have someone responsible for **leading on strategic changes** to improve and sustain the quality of children's play at school. This is ideally the head teacher, but if not, it should be another member of the senior management team. They will need to have an understanding of children's play and its importance in school life, to advocate for play and to support it. They will also need to ensure that the school engages with children, **all** staff (teaching and non-teaching, including lunchtime staff, caretakers/janitors, administrators and others), parents/caregivers and community and other stakeholders in developing strategic and policy changes. They will be responsible for periodic reviews of strategy and policy.

If there is no such person from the senior leadership level of the school, those who work in the area will find that they have to fight repeatedly for playtime, as without a leader as advocate, play will lose out to seemingly more pressing issues, such as the focus on academic achievement and competence testing, end of term meetings, and even covering the next tasks at the maths lesson. The experience of those supporting play in schools has shown that this is a frequent reason for failure even despite the best of intentions.

In addition, introducing playtime into the ethos, spaces, timetable and diary of the school is a collaborative effort. It does not only need to be supported strategically, but it has to become part of the day-to-day strategic management of the school, including scheduling the weekly timetable, which is also usually done at senior level.

However, at the same time there has to be someone responsible for **leading on actions** to improve and sustain the quality of children's play at school as well. This person will be responsible for operations management: making and implementing decisions on the design and resourcing of spaces for play, supporting the staff working with children at play (including their training and professional development), documenting the school's actions and reviews on building a Play-friendly School, and so on. They will need to be in a sufficiently senior position to be able to make decisions and implement them. In addition, this is the person who needs to be an enthusiastic advocate for self-organised play, well-trained and informed about supporting children's play in schools.

In some small schools, it may be that it is the same person who is responsible both for strategy and operations. If this is the case, schools are advised to identify another person who can act as champion, in order to ensure quality, continuity and sustainability. Another common reason for failure is that there is a single advocate who successfully makes changes but then leaves, and momentum is lost.

### **3.2 The importance of a whole-school approach**

While the support from the school leadership is essential to develop a Play-friendly School, it is also important to have a whole-school approach. This means that the importance of play should be understood at **all** levels of school operation (including not only teachers, but supporting staff), and therefore **playtime and play access is valued**, and there is a supportive climate for play across the whole of school life.

As Cohen and his colleagues state:

school climate is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures ... This climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. People are engaged and respected.<sup>33</sup>

They also assert that good school climate is directly related to the academic achievement of the pupils.

This means that for a play-friendly climate or atmosphere, the value of play should be built into the norms, values and also the practices of all members of the school community – and this is where it can easily fall down. There is a large difference between countries and schools in this regard, but nevertheless it might not be too bold to say that in most schools play is still looked upon as

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<sup>33</sup> Cohen, J.; McCabe, L.; Michelli, N. M.; Pickeral, T. (2009): School Climate: Research, Policy, Practice, and Teacher Education, *Teachers College Record*, 111(1), pp. 182

something that comes “after work”, as a reward, and therefore deprivation of playtime is used as a punishment.

The best efforts of a school leadership can fail if there are staff members who think this way, and also the credibility for children will be lost – they will definitely be aware if their teacher is against their play, and this will have a negative impact.

The **school procedures and policy documents** should also acknowledge the value of play, which should be clearly communicated to all school citizens: teachers, staff, pupils and parents. It is widely experienced that without such explicit and clear value statements, it is the most vocal parents who “write” the procedures, they are the ones who have the most influence. For example, several teachers will not let children play in ways that can make them dirty, as they are afraid of some parents who will be angry about this. If it is written in the school documents and procedures that children might get dirty at playtimes and parents need to provide dress for that or accept it, then the pressure from such parents will be much less. However, schools also need to appreciate that poorer families and those with parents working many hours, there may not be the opportunity for owning more than one school uniform or for washing clothes before the next school day, and so provision of outdoor clothing might need to be considered as a part of the ‘access’ section of the written statement covered in section 4.4 below.

School actions should also support the value of play at several levels. Playful approaches can be built into lessons (covered in section 5.4) and into the whole-school day (see section 5.5), play-friendly staff can be praised, supported or even awarded, materials and tools for playfulness should be provided, and joy and laughter be embraced.

## Chapter 4: Quality Criterion 2 - The school has a written statement on how it supports play

### Quality Criterion 2: The school has a written statement on how it supports play

- 2.1. We have a written statement that includes our understanding of the nature and value of play, showing an appreciation of the importance of self-organised play
- 2.2. We have involved the whole-school community in the development and review of this statement
- 2.3. The statement shows how the school is committed to supporting children's play and creating sufficient time, space and permission
- 2.4. The statement shows how we will make spaces and times for play accessible to all children (girls and boys, disabled children, children with different backgrounds, families, cultures, etc.) and in all weathers
- 2.5. The statement clearly outlines the school's approach to risk-taking and how we balance risk and benefit
- 2.6. The statement shows how we will develop our knowledge of play and how to support it, through recruitment, training and professional development programmes for staff and parents
- 2.7. The statement identifies the people responsible for strategic and operations management in improving opportunities for children to play at school

### 4.1 The PARK framework for the written statement

The PARK framework is borrowed heavily from a useful document from UK OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) founder Michael Follett,<sup>34</sup> drawing on his experience of supporting schools to become more play-friendly. Michael has been an external adviser to the CAPS project. He says schools should start by getting the culture right, using four principles: policy, access, risk and knowledge. In English, these have been turned into a memorable acronym: **PARK**. Here, we address them in a slightly different order: policy, knowledge, access and risk.

**Policy** is about developing and publishing a clear, agreed statement that includes your school's values and principles regarding children's play and the actions you will take to support it (this criterion). **Knowledge** refers to the importance of training and professional development for staff in understanding play and adults' role in supporting play. **Access** is about what your school puts in place to make sure all children can access all resources for play all year round. **Risk** is about acknowledging there is no challenge without risk and being clear on how schools balance risk and safety. All the **PARK** principles feed into the development and review of the written statement.

<sup>34</sup> Follett, M. (2016) *Making Playtime a Key Part of the School Day!*: <https://outdoorclassroomday.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/06/ECD-Making-Playtime-a-Key-Part-of-the-School-Day.pdf>

## 4.2 Policy

In the UK, schools develop their own policies on a range of topics. We know that this is not necessarily the case in other countries, and so Quality Criterion 2 talks about a written statement on how the school supports play. The statement acts as **internally facing guidance** for children, staff and families, and also as an **externally facing statement** of principle, commitment and practice. It should include the **values, principles and beliefs** the school holds about the importance of time, space and permission for children to play throughout the school day.

The written statement is also a living document, and so can contain the school's strategy (the long-term plan of achievable goals) and action plans (the detailed steps of how a strategy will be delivered). The values, principles and beliefs will guide all decision-making on actions to improve the quality of play in the school, and these sections can be updated as the school progresses towards play-friendly status.

The process of developing the statement is itself important. The experience of colleagues on the OPAL project is that schools can only succeed in making and sustaining changes to improve conditions for play if it is a whole-school approach. This means thinking about who all the stakeholders might be, and how to involve them in the process of becoming a Play-friendly School. This works best through wide participation in the development of the written statement.

### 4.2.1 Who might stakeholders be?

Clearly, the school's management team and teaching staff, as well as teaching assistants and others who work directly with the children, such as midday supervisors. It also includes those crucial non-teaching staff such as caretakers, cleaners, those on governing boards. It also includes families and caregivers, and, of course, the children themselves.

### 4.2.2 A word on children's participation

Many schools have children's councils or other mechanisms for children to be involved in decisions affecting them, in line with article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>35</sup>. Such a body is a useful mechanism for gathering children's perspectives on what they think a Play-friendly School might look like. However, a word of caution here: although it may seem democratic to ask children about this, there are limitations to this formal approach. First, such a formal adult-controlled structure only attracts certain kinds of children, and the structures and strictures of the formal democratic process still tend to mean it is adult-dominated and led. Second, when asked directly about playing, children can only make suggestions based on their own experience. Third, if children's ideas are taken on board, they become responsible for the decisions ('well, you chose this tunnel slide...'), when the responsibility should lie with adults. Fourth, asking children about playing assumes that they know how they will want to play; the focus is often on equipment and physical design (perhaps with some aspects of the culture). It does not allow for play as emergent, contingent and opportunistic. Finally, not everything about our experiences of life can be captured in language: the spontaneity, nonsense, anticipation, motivation, pleasure and sometimes tragedies of playing are not experiences that can be adequately represented in the limits of language and formal democratic procedures. This is not to say that schools should not use the mechanism of school

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/what-is-the-convention>

councils to encourage children's participation in the formal decision-making processes. It does, however, suggest that more is needed.

This handbook introduces several creative and space-based approaches for adults to account for how spaces work in terms of supporting or constraining play that are useful in terms of moving beyond trying to capture playfulness in words alone (see section 6.6). These can also be adapted for use with children, in order to gather what we call 'collective wisdom' about what supports or constrains the emergence of playfulness. Collective wisdom acknowledges that there are many different ways of experiencing how spaces are produced, and all should be taken into account through the whole-school approach. A few examples are given here of ways of gathering children's perceptions on their ability to find time, space and permission for playing in school. They should all form the basis of further discussion aimed at drawing out more details and examples, but not in order to impose adult views:

- Drawing maps: children can draw maps of any spaces in the school, but for this purpose probably it is best to start with the outside space for playing. How they draw the maps (what is included/excluded, etc) will be pertinent. You can develop this by asking what children like to do now in the space and what they would like to do in any changed spaces – but avoid a tendency to focus on equipment, try and encourage responses such as run, hide, be with my friends (see section 6.5 for more pointers on this: this activity is intended for adults rather than children, but will explain the thinking behind it in more detail).
- Photos/ videos: asking children to take photos or videos of spaces in the school that are significant to them in some way. These may be spaces of joy or anxiety, of discovery or fear, of belonging or loneliness, etc.
- Drawings: similar to maps and photos, you can ask children to draw spaces that have meaning for them.
- Stories: through stories children can remove themselves from direct observation, they can be one step removed as the main character does not have to be them.
- Use drama situations: as for stories, drama can allow a broader enquiry in how children feel able to find time, space, permission to play. The publication from our previous Erasmus+ ARTPAD project offers some ideas for this.<sup>36</sup>

#### **4.2.3 What should the statement address?**

The statement of the school's values, principles and beliefs, the statement should include the school's understanding of the nature and value of play, showing an appreciation of the importance of self-organised play. It is important to differentiate self-organised play from adult-directed activities that might be playful. Both are important, but for play times (programmed times throughout the school day when there are no other demands on the children), the focus should be on 'free' play that is not directed by adults.

The statement should also clearly show how the school creates time, space and permission for children to play. It should say what programmed times are available for children to play when there are no other demands on them, as well as actions taken to make space available and the adult

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<sup>36</sup> ARTPAD (2017) *Best Practice Guide Achieving Resilience Through Play and Drama* offers the theories behind the approach and ARTPAD (2018) *A Training Guide* offers some practical approaches for using drama, games and play. Both available from <http://artpadproject.eu/publications>

approach to supporting self-organised play. In addition, it needs to include how play will be supported at other times during the school day (e.g. playful pedagogies, an openness to playful moments that might arise opportunistically). It also needs to cover issues of access and risk, which are discussed below.

## 4.3 Knowledge: thinking about play

This section of the handbook looks at different (and sometimes contradictory) ways of thinking about what play is, how it happens and what its value is. Adult roles in supporting children's play are covered in other sections of the handbook. The school's written statement about play should include values and principles statements about the school's understanding of play and also how the school will support the training and professional development of all adults who have a role.

### 4.3.1 What do we mean by 'play'?

The great play scholar Brian Sutton-Smith once said:

We all play occasionally, and we all know what playing feels like. But when it comes to making theoretical statements about what play is, we fall into silliness. There is little agreement among us and much ambiguity.<sup>37</sup>

Some of this is because people cannot agree where a boundary between 'play' and 'not-play' lies. For example, is watching a film playing? Or playing a musical instrument (for pleasure, as a job, in an exam)? Or professional competitive sport?

Others say it is because we cannot agree what kind of phenomenon play is. The philosopher Randolph Feezell<sup>38</sup> suggests we can think about 'play' in at least five different ways:

- **Play as behaviour or activity:** the most common conceptualisation, and perhaps why we tend to think in terms of play as something that has a beginning and an end, and that takes place in designated places.
- **Play as attitude, motive or a state of mind:** the idea of playfulness is much more linked to motive and attitude than activity, and from this perspective, play can be seen as something that will erupt when conditions are right and then fall away, sometimes in a matter of moments and often in very mundane everyday ways.
- **Play as form or structure:** some who study play look at the 'how', for example the play types or play cycles considered in 4.3.2 below, or looking at the rules of play – how players know that what is happening is playful (think play fighting or banter).
- **Play as meaningful experience:** this is about the value of play, both in terms of the immediate intrinsic value for the player and in terms of more instrumental benefits of playing. Traditionally, adults have imposed their own meanings onto children's play, often seeking a value for it beyond playing itself. Others argue that playing has intrinsic value and is for its own sake. It is useful to try and move beyond this simple binary perspective.
- **Play as an ontologically separate phenomenon:** some philosophers of play suggest that rather than the players playing the play, the play plays the players; in other words, play is a

<sup>37</sup> Sutton-Smith, B. (199) *The Ambiguity of Play*, p. 1

<sup>38</sup> Feezell, R. (2010) 'A Pluralist Conception of Play', *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 37, pp. 147-165.

phenomenon that arises as something distinct from the individual and shared experiences of the players.

You can see how these five different ways of thinking about play can make it difficult to come up with a definition of what play is. Three definitions are introduced here – there are many more in the literature, but these include common elements.

The first comes from a developmental psychologist, Catherine Garvey. She lists the following characteristics and says that all five have to be present in order for a behaviour to be considered to be play.

- Play is pleasurable and enjoyable (but not necessarily always ‘fun’);
- Play has no extrinsic goals (the motivation to play is intrinsic, it is more about process rather than product, means rather than ends);
- Play is spontaneous and voluntary (although there will always be constraints and compromises, as discussed further below);
- Play involves active engagement on the part of the player (this is often contested – might watching a film be playing?);
- Play has systematic relations to what is not play.<sup>39</sup>

This last characteristic, possibly the most interesting, deserves a little more attention perhaps. What Garvey means here is that the separation of play and ‘not-play’ is a false one. Not only do play actions resemble ‘real life’ actions (play has often been described as actions in a simulative mode), but its benefits extend beyond ‘just’ playing.

The second comes from Gordon Burghardt, a biologist who studies animal play. His five characteristics of play are:

- Play has limited immediate function (it is ‘as if’ behaviour, not for any immediate survival function);
- Play is spontaneous, voluntary and carried out for its own sake;
- Play is structurally or temporally different from the actions it mimics (for example, play fighting is not the same as real fighting; nonsense elements can enter into play, it is not constrained by ‘reality’, it is ‘as if’);
- Play is carried out repeatedly during the juvenile period (children and young animals often play in the same ways, but things are always slightly different);
- Play only happens in a ‘relaxed field’ (if young animals are chronically stressed or under threat they are unlikely to play).<sup>40</sup>

The final list of characteristics comes from the UK Playwork Principles. There, play is defined as:

a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Garvey, C. (1977) *Play*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>40</sup> Burghardt, G. (2005) *The Genesis of Animal Play: Testing the limits*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

<sup>41</sup> For more detail on the Playwork Principles, see chapter 7.

Many of these characteristics are recognisable from the literature. However, the notion of play being freely chosen is perhaps rather idealised and therefore problematic when it comes to how children behave at school. Anyone who has watched groups of children at play will know that in order for group games to succeed, different roles need to be taken. The power relationships within groups are clear to see in the process of allocating roles: often if children want to be a part of the group game, they will have to accept another member of the group telling them how to play. However, the principle of self-organisation is useful in that it helps to reduce too much intrusion, or adulteration, from adults who seek to control or direct children's play. **For Play-friendly Schools, the key principle is that the play that takes place in the playground should be as self-organised by the children as possible; using playful pedagogies, however, will require a slightly more directive and structured approach.**

Similarly, the idea of 'choice' implies that this is a matter of rational weighing up of options, but that may not be what happens in the thick of it. Play emerges from the assemblage of everything there at that time and that place, and this may include the resources available, landscape features, emotions, feelings, desires to be part of the crowd, anxiety about pain or being told off, opportunistic and spontaneous actions, and so on. Spontaneity leads to unpredictability. Anything can spark a change in direction of the play or can set off a new game. If spontaneity and therefore unpredictability are key qualities of play, this raises interesting questions around choice. However, the principle of supporting self-organised play (where perhaps it is the play itself that is self-organised) at play times still holds.

This idea of seeing play itself as self-organised rather than individual children freely choosing how they play is worth a bit more consideration. Children (and adults) are motivated to seek out opportunities where life feels better, usually through seeking out opportunities for playing wherever they are. However, this does not progress through separate and individual choice making – we have seen earlier how this way of describing play can be problematic. Rather, the desire to seek out moments where life is better gets thrown into the assemblage of each moment, and children's encounters with whatever is to hand (landscape, material objects, other people or animals, as well as more intangible aspects such as the culture of the school, knowledge of behaviour codes and consequences and so on) shift and change dynamically to produce what we might recognise as moments of playing. Playing emerges from the assemblage rather than being directly controlled by each individual child. Playing will erupt whenever the conditions allow; children's preferences, desires and capacity to act will be one part of the overall assemblage. In a sense, this is Feezell's fifth way of theorising play. What it means is that **adults seeking to support children's play need to learn how to pay attention to the conditions that support and constrain it.**

Playing has also been described as the deliberate creation of uncertainty,<sup>42</sup> and also as being in control of being out of control.<sup>43</sup> It is often spontaneous, opportunistic and fleeting, engaged in for the pleasure it brings for that moment.

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<sup>42</sup> Spinka, M., Newberry, R. and Bekoff, M. (2001) 'Mammalian Play: Training for the unexpected', *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, 76 (2), pp. 141-168.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon, G. and Esbjorn-Hargens, S. (2007) 'Are we having fun yet? An Exploration of the Transformative Power of Play', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 47, pp. 198-222.

Try keeping an eye out for moments of playfulness that may arise anywhere and everywhere: in the supermarket, on the bus. Pay as much attention as you can to the tiny details of the scenario. These moments help us to look beyond play as a time and space bound activity and more towards what the conditions are that support the emergence of playfulness. Usually, they are very ordinary: play is interwoven into everyday life in fairly mundane ways, and yet it is these moments that contribute significantly to children's wellbeing and enjoyment of life.

### **4.3.2 Looking at how play happens: play types, the play cycle**

*Play Types:* Play takes many forms. Those who study animal play often group play into three categories: play with objects, locomotor play and rough and tumble play. Others remark on the diversity of play forms, many more than three, some suggesting there may be hundreds. Playwork writer Bob Hughes, having trawled the literature on play, came up with a list of 16 play types:<sup>44</sup>

- Communication (playing with words)
- Creative (approaching materials experimentally)
- Dramatic (performance)
- Fantasy (experiencing what could never be)
- Exploratory (exploring how things work)
- Deep (risk taking, explored more in section 4.5)
- Imaginative (imagining the real world)
- Locomotor (physical movement)
- Mastery (controlling the natural environment)
- Object (exploring the properties of objects)
- Recapitulative (reliving past stages of human evolution)
- Role (playing out familiar roles)
- Rough and tumble (play fighting)
- Social (play with rules)
- Socio-dramatic (recreating scenes from children's own lives)
- Symbolic (where an object stands for something else).

Play Scotland have produced a toolkit looking at how the play types can support the Scottish curriculum, and so will be useful for schools looking at playful pedagogies.<sup>45</sup>

***The Play Cycle:*** Two other playwork writers, Gordon Sturrock and Perry Else, developed a model for understanding the play process, drawing on ideas from depth psychology.<sup>46</sup> They see play as an expression of latent material and suggest that being able to play out and play through this latent material is the basis of good mental health, preventing future neuroses. They suggest that play takes the form of a cycle with six component parts.<sup>47</sup> The cycle takes place both in the internal (the mind) and the external world of the child. The starting point is termed the '**metalude**', and this is the moment of imagination or daydreaming in the child's mind which results in their issuing a '**play cue**'. This cue can be verbal or non-verbal and is an invitation to another child or adult, or to an object or the environment. Play cues are issued with the expectation of some kind of response: if a positive '**return**' is made (either in terms of a person joining in the play or in terms of sufficient flexibility or interest from an object or the environment) then a '**play frame**' is created. The play frame forms a

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<sup>44</sup> A summary in English can be found here: <https://www.playscotland.org/playful-learning/play-types/>

<sup>45</sup> The Play Types Toolkit for schools (Play Scotland, 2019): <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Loose-Parts-Play-Toolkit-2019-web.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Sturrock, G. and Else, P. (1998) *The playground as therapeutic space: playwork as healing*. ('The Colorado Paper')

<sup>47</sup> This summary is adapted from Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2008) *Play for a Change: Play, Policy and Practice – A review of contemporary perspectives*.

boundary that separates what takes place within (play) from what is outside, and can be created by physical boundaries, rules, rituals and narratives as well as play faces and body language (metacommunication) that tells the players that this is play and not for real. Once the cue and return have been established within the play frame, then '**play flow**' takes place; this is where the players become engrossed in the content, narratives, themes or exchanges of the play frame. The sixth and final element of the play cycle is termed '**play annihilation**' and this refers to the moment when the players decide to bring the cycle to an end. Often this moment is misunderstood by adults who may see it as destructive and may attempt to maintain the playing.

Play cues might not always be seen as positive behaviour, especially if they are overlaid with anxiety or aggression, and can at times be misunderstood. For some children, a lack of return to their cue induces anxiety that means they reissue the same cue again and again. Sturrock and Else terms this '**dysplay**'. It is often understood by adults as challenging behaviour.

#### **4.3.3 Looking at the value of play**

Just as there is much disagreement about definitions and forms of play, so there is no agreement on its value and function. Gordon Burghardt<sup>48</sup> provides the following selection of quotations to demonstrate the huge range of ideas, current and historical, on the nature of human play that can be discerned even through a small literature search:

Play is the process most conducive to improved motor skills, learning ability, imagination, and educational attainments in infancy and childhood.

Play underlies all creativity and innovation, including art and science produced by adults.

Play, like idleness, is not only wasted time, but is also a process leading to the neglect of study and work.

Play is just fooling around; the start of the slippery slope leading to delinquency, gambling, and even crime.

Play is freedom.

Play is the happy and enthusiastic participation in life.

Play is cruel sport, teasing, and competition.

Play is an essential respite from the solemn cares of life.

Play is serious behavior in which the arts of war are learned (think of the Duke of Wellington's remark about the Battle of Waterloo being won on the playing fields of Eton).

Play is encouraged by the powerful in society to distract the masses from their oppression, or more benignly, their lack of control over decisions affecting them.

Play must be organized and controlled by governments or other adult institutions to control young people and channel them into responsible adulthood.

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<sup>48</sup> Burghardt, G. (2005) *The Genesis of Animal Play: Testing the limits*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Play has been idealized by manufacturers in order to sell expensive toys to nervous parents rather than their children.

Play behavior has been exploited by manufacturers so they can produce and sell antisocial or gender-stereotyping toys and violent games that appeal to children, but have no socially redeeming value.

Play is subversive and undermines the state.

Play is a bourgeois product of industrialization and was so labelled only after work became estranged from everyday activities.

Play is the source of the rituals and myths by which we structure our lives. All life is but a game or a stage on which we strut during our allotted time.

Adult theorisations of children's play often say more about adults' desires for children than children's own experiences of playing. After a lifetime of studying play, Brian Sutton-Smith suggested that the ideologies of play scholarship can be divided into seven '**rhetorics**'.<sup>49</sup>

- **Play as progress:** From this perspective, play is viewed and valued as a key mechanism for development for children and young animals. It perhaps provides the most cherished perspective currently in western society, yet as Sutton-Smith claims, it may have little empirical evidence to support it.
- **Play as imaginary:** As the name suggests, this rhetoric views play as transformative, able to create situations of pretence, improvisation and fantasy.
- **Play of the self:** Explanations and justifications of play that focus on the 'peak experience' associated with immersion, flow, pleasure – the intrinsic value of play for the player.
- **Play as fate:** Here, play is viewed as existential optimism, with a belief in destiny, chance and luck.
- **Play as power:** The rhetoric of play as power represents the ways in which play may be used to maintain and strengthen the status of those who control the play.
- **Play as identity:** 'Identity' here is a collective rather than individual identity. Play is viewed in a social context and represents belonging to a community of players that may have its own unique culture and identity and forms of expression.
- **Play as frivolity:** Play turns the world upside down; it inverts the classic work ethic and thrives on nonsense and foolishness.

Sutton-Smith suggests that the rhetoric of fate, power, frivolity and identity represent 'ancient' traditions for studying and explaining play, while the rhetoric of progress, imaginary and self may be seen as a 'modern' set, where play is rationalised to perform a useful function. As has been said, by far the dominant rhetoric when it comes to studying children's play is the progress rhetoric. Play is valued for its role in learning and development. This is a powerful argument for the benefits of play, particularly for schools; however, it also obscures other ways of understanding play's value. It is a future-focused perspective, placing value on what children will or should become; other perspectives can consider the immediate benefits of playing for children's health and wellbeing.

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<sup>49</sup> Sutton-Smith, B. (199) *The Ambiguity of Play*

In their play, children often appropriate aspects of their everyday lives, and so it may look like they are practising skills for the future. However, on closer inspection, and in line with Burghardt's thinking introduced in 4.3.1 above, children often distort those aspects, introducing nonsense or exaggeration, turning the everyday world upside down in order to make it either less scary or less boring. Sutton-Smith argues that play is motivated 'primarily by feelings and not just by images of reality'.<sup>50</sup> Children can experience raw primary emotions such as fear, anger, shock, disgust, happiness and sadness in their play without the consequences that such emotions may bring in the 'real' world. They are mediated by the social, secondary emotions that help create the rules and rituals that let players know this is play. This is what gives playing its vitality and motivates children to seek out more play.

In their literature review on play, Lester and Russell<sup>51</sup> suggested that play's immediate benefits might be to experience this emotional vitality as pleasure that is at the basis of good mental health and wellbeing. It also primes stress response systems and emotional regulation, helping children cope with the unexpected. It also plays a key role in building attachments to peers and also places, and supports creativity and an openness to learning. These are immediate benefits that will also have value for children in later life, but more in terms of developing an architecture of wellbeing than learning specific skills.

#### 4.3.4 The value triangle

The dominant way of understanding the value of play places an *instrumental* value onto it, by suggesting that play is valuable for something other than play: learning specific skills, engaging in physical activity, and so on. The problem with this is that if we only consider this instrumental value, some of the more immediate benefits of play can be lost, for example those that accrue from the sheer nonsense of playing, or from play's spontaneous, opportunistic and irrational nature. A useful tool for considering the tension between play's instrumental and intrinsic value is one that was developed originally to consider the value of public funding for the arts and culture. John Holden<sup>52</sup> suggests a value triangle which shows an interrelationship between three values, adapted here to children's play:

- the *intrinsic* value of play: the sheer pleasure of playing for its own sake, something that is difficult to measure in terms of outcomes;
- the *instrumental* value: how play can help meet adult desires for children, such as learning skills, physical activity, etc.;
- the *institutional* value: how the school can add value to what they offer by becoming play-friendly.

#### 4.3.5 Including play in your written statement

The first indicator for this Quality Criterion states that your written statement should include your understanding of the nature and value of play, showing an appreciation of the importance of self-organised play. It adds:

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<sup>50</sup> *The Ambiguity of Play*, p. 157

<sup>51</sup> *Play for a Change*

<sup>52</sup> Holden, J. (2006) *Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy: Why culture needs a democratic mandate*, London: Demos.

It is important to differentiate self-organised play from adult-directed activities that might be playful. Both are important, but for play times (programmed times throughout the school day when there are no other demands on the children), the focus should be on ‘free’ play that is not directed by adults. Given this, schools may want to develop guidelines for boundaries on the key issues regarding children’s self-organised playing: risk, dirt and the freedom to play how they want.

The statement should include a set of values, principles and beliefs and an action plan for practical improvement and review. The values, principles and beliefs will guide all decision-making on actions to improve the quality of play. Actions should state when they will be implemented, who will be responsible, and include a process for review.

This section of the handbook has introduced a few different ways of thinking about what play is, how it works and what its value is. These are all covered in the training course too. Try to facilitate a good in-depth discussion with your stakeholders about how you understand play; this is likely to be different depending on whether you are talking about paying at play times or playful pedagogies. A key principle of the Play-friendly School label, however, is that the school should be as open as possible to children’s self-organised playing. This is in line with the UNCRC’s definition of play in General Comment 17 as:

non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end. It may take infinite forms but the key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity.

Finally, don’t forget to include in your written statement how you train staff and support their professional development.

#### 4.4 Access

All children need to play irrespective of age, gender, culture, social background, economic circumstances and different physical and mental ability. It is important therefore that when you start working on making your school play-friendly, you take the needs of **all** children in your school (and possible future children too) into consideration without making assumptions. Many groups of people face discrimination on the basis of their race, nationality, colour, creed, religion, gender, disability, age and personal circumstances. Discrimination means that some children are prevented or disadvantaged from joining in play opportunities on equal terms. Children who experience discrimination can develop low self-esteem, low confidence, and feelings of alienation and inferiority. A number of tools are offered in the handbook to support schools to pay attention to assumptions and the habits and routines of how the school functions and hold these up to critical scrutiny (for example, section 4.2.2 on children’s participation, and the section 6.6 on critical cartography). These tools are intended to build towards a collective wisdom that can embrace different ways of knowing about how the spaces and culture work to support or constrain play for all children.

As a starting point it is important to include in your written statement something that demonstrates that the opportunities for play your school offers are both inclusive and encourage anti-discriminatory practice. This means that all children should be able to take part and the onus is on

the adults to adapt and change the space, resources, systems and culture in ways that will support the participation of **all** children. Barriers to inclusion can be environmental, institutional or attitudinal.

It is also important to make sure that all children can access all the resources all of the year. In countries where often poor weather gets in the way, schools should think about ways to overcome this. Often this is merely taking simple measures like ensuring children have correct clothing and footwear, or installing a ‘wellie rack’ for storing outdoor footwear.

## 4.5 Risk

Risk is an integral aspect of children’s play. It is understandable that adults want children to be safe, but there is a growing body of evidence that shows that over-protection may be counterproductive and that healthy play encompasses risk taking on children’s own terms.

In ‘Avoiding a Dystopian Future for Children’s Play’,<sup>53</sup> the authors discuss a culture of fear that now permeates society, resulting in a general intolerance towards risk and futile attempts to remove any danger from the lives of children.

The incremental change that creeps up over decades can cause generational amnesia to set in whereby previously enjoyed freedoms and desired goals lapse into distant memories. Moreover, because of globalisation, the problem is also global.

The authors go on to point out the wealth of evidence for the benefits of outdoor play for children’s education, health and well-being, particularly in nature, including ‘mental and physical health, physical activity, development, and even the gut microbiome and myopia’. One important benefit of challenge is, ‘to move beyond what is already known and is already easily accomplished’.<sup>54</sup> There is no challenge without risk. Think about how babies learn to walk – if we wanted to prevent them from falling, would they ever learn?

There is a considerable wealth of research into children’s approaches to risk in their play, and although some have a greater desire for risk-taking than others, it appears a universal aspect of play. Children deliberately seek out uncertainty, whether that is doing a handstand, twirling round until they become dizzy, engaging in rough and tumble play or more obviously risky behaviours such as climbing at height. The very nature of play involves unpredictability, novelty, uncertainty and so on.

Ellen Sandseter identifies 6 categories of risky play:

- 1) Play with great heights, 2) Play with high speed, 3) Play with harmful tools, 4) Play near dangerous elements, 5) Rough-and-tumble play, and 6) Play where the children can “disappear” / get lost.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ball, D., Brussoni, M., Gill, T.R., Harbottle, H. and Spiegel, B. (2019) Avoiding a Dystopian Future for Children’s Play, *International Journal of Play*, 8(1), pp.3-10.

<sup>54</sup> Follett, M. (2016) *Making Play-time a Key Part of the School Day!*

<sup>55</sup> Sandseter, E.B.H. (2007) Categorizing Risky Play – how can we identify risk-taking in children’s play? *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15(2), pp.237-252.

To this we can add the range of emotional and social risks that children also take in their play. Much of the research points out that generally children are competent in making judgements about what they are comfortable attempting.

#### 4.5.1 Risk assessment

Risk assessment is a concept that has grown in popularity over recent decades. It is based on the idea that risk exists ‘out there’ in a way that can be measured (assessed) and that we have a duty to assess risk in order to prevent the harms it may lead to.

Schools are responsible for children’s safety, and therefore staff are expected to have good skills in risk assessment. The literature on risk in children’s play has sought to balance adult fears, risk of injury and the benefits of risk (see 4.5.2 below). A useful starting point is to understand the difference between a risk and a hazard. A hazard might be understood as **a potential source of danger**, whereas a risk can be seen as **the probability of a hazard causing actual harm or injury**. Some hazards offer nothing to play experiences, such as broken glass or rusty nails, and need to be removed. Others, such as sharp tools, play equipment or trees, need a more nuanced approach

A judgement needs to be made as to whether the risk is acceptable or not. If all risk was considered unacceptable, then children’s opportunities for play would be severely limited. Risk-taking is a normal part of life and growing up - without it we do not learn how to cope, discover our capabilities or develop new skills. Children therefore need the opportunities to test their judgements, extend their abilities and to take responsibility for themselves. In addition, the sheer thrill of risk-taking brings benefits in terms of pleasure and enjoyment (far from being an indulgence, these are the basis of good mental health). Staff will need to decide which risks are acceptable and which risks are unacceptable because the potential danger is just too great.

Brussoni and colleagues’ literature review on risk-taking and free play<sup>56</sup> concluded that children usually find ‘institutionalised’ places, such as playgrounds, boring and so sought out other opportunities for risk taking. However, research also shows that children learn risk management for themselves and their peers through risky play. They even show clear harm-mitigating strategies during their play and shared their strategies with peers during play. To provide places where they can try **risky play** (with risk-benefit assessment and appropriate prevention) can be a good alternative to unsafe public places.

#### 5.5.2 Risk-benefit assessment

Risk-benefit assessment involves identifying the hazards and the possible risks they present and also identifying the benefits afforded by children in taking/coping with such risks and experiencing the thrill they offer. Playing out in the snow for example could be highly risky – children could slip and fall and incur moderate injuries, the snow itself might not be icy, the ground beneath may be hazardous. But if we only looked at the risks we’d never allow it! The benefits of playing in the snow however, are numerous (confidence, competence, co-ordination, exploration, coping skills, joy, togetherness, doing something different, thrill...) and as long as we have checked (and continue to

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<sup>56</sup> Brussoni, M., Olsen, L. L., Pike, I., & Sleet, D. A. (2012) Risky Play and Children’s Safety: Balancing priorities for optimal child development, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 9(9), pp. 3134–3148.

check) the conditions and we are familiar with children's individual/general skills, moods and behaviours, then what's wrong with playing in the snow?

Risk-benefit assessment is recommended in the UK's Children's Play Safety Forum document 'Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide'.<sup>57</sup> The Play Safety Forum is a collaboration between play organisations, the Association of Play Industries, The Child Accident Prevention Trust and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, and the guide is endorsed by the UK Health and Safety Executive. This gives it the authority to be taken seriously, and

has also influenced industry standards. The latest version of the European Standard for fixed play equipment explicitly states that it is concerned with balancing risks and benefits. This change should improve the decisions of inspectors, the courts and others.

Generally, it promotes the benefits as play value (social, physical, psychological), learning (how to cope with real risks), and reduction in risk exposure (relocating children from other more dangerous sites).

The guide is definitely worth reading, as it includes the legal and policy framework (which, although UK-focused also includes a European perspective), arguments about the benefits of risk-taking in play and the value of play provision, and approaches to carrying out risk-benefits assessments.

Designing your own risk-benefit assessments forms will depend on the context for your own school. Staff should carry out, record and keep risk assessments on all spaces where children play, and again when significant changes are made. In addition, because the areas are supervised (which allows for a little more leeway in terms of level of risk than an unsupervised playground), risk-benefit assessments can be 'dynamic', that is, trained, experienced and confident staff who know the children and the space can make professional judgements from moment to moment as children engage with the space.

An example Risk Benefit Assessment Form can be downloaded here  
<http://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/risk-benefit-assessment-form/>.

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<sup>57</sup> Ball, D., Gill, T and Spiegel, B. (2012) *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An implementation guide*, available from: <http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/172644/managing-risk-in-play-provision.pdf>.

## Chapter 5: Quality Criterion 3 - Children have sufficient time for playing

### Quality Criterion 3: Children have sufficient time for playing

- 3.1. We make sufficient time available as a part of the timetable for children's self-organised playing when there are no other demands on them
- 3.2. Times programmed for play are honoured and not taken away
- 3.3. We consider making time for playful pedagogies
- 3.4. We pay attention to and work with moments of playfulness throughout the school day

The first two criteria pay attention to leadership structures and process for schools to become play-friendly. The last three begin to focus on what things are like for children, looking at time, space and permission to play (the culture of the school), outlining the changes that schools may need to make. These three do not exist in isolation, they are interdependent and interrelated. Criterion 3 looks at time for play, Criterion 4 at space and Criterion 5 at the school culture.

### 5.1 General Comment 17 on article 31 of the UNCRC

In 2013, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child published a General Comment (number 17) on article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, following a campaign by several international NGOs led by the International Play Association. The document states:

Based on its reviews of the implementation of the rights of the child under the Convention, the Committee is concerned by the poor recognition given by States to the rights contained in article 31. Poor recognition of their significance in the lives of children results in lack of investment in appropriate provisions, weak or non-existent protective legislation and the invisibility of children in national and local-level planning. In general, where investment is made, it is in the provision of structured and organised activities, but equally important is the need to create time and space for children to engage in spontaneous play, recreation and creativity, and to promote societal attitudes that support and encourage such activity.

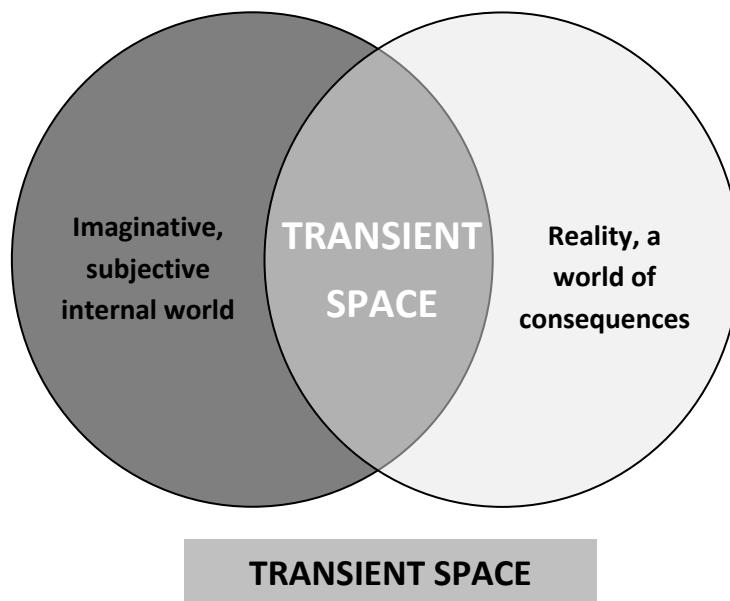
The Comment offers an interpretation of article 31 and sets the context for its realisation, highlighting challenges to be addressed and children requiring particular attention. It reasserts governments' obligations and makes recommendations for what governments can do to help respect, protect and fulfil article 31 rights, including the right to play. This includes strongly encouraging governments to legislate for children's article 31 rights, saying governments 'should address the principle of sufficiency – all children should be given sufficient time and space to exercise these rights'. The Comment also has specific recommendations for schools, including the provision of adequate indoor and outdoor space to facilitate play (and other article 31 rights) **during and around school hours**, suggesting that schools should consider how their grounds might be used out of school hours; that schools should structure the day to allow **sufficient time** for rest and play; a

curriculum that includes cultural and artistic activities; and a pedagogy that offers active, playful and participatory activities and learning.

## 5.2 The importance of extended periods for playing

The idea that play is a basic adaptive and learning mechanism is already taken as common sense by researchers of learning. As Chan and Siegel say, “*From evolutionary vantage point at the genetic and cultural levels, play is activity that enables individuals to engage creatively in new situations, generating new, adaptive responses in potential future interactions and environments*”.<sup>58</sup>

This means that play is an activity through which we learn to adapt to new situations. Winnicott, the famous psychologist, analyses play as an action in the transitional space: it is not internal to the self, however it is not in the “real life” either<sup>59</sup>. An in-between space, a fusion of body, mind and the environment. A special learning space for non-conscious – and very-very effective – learning, where everything can be tried and even failed without consequences.



However, for this unconscious learning to occur, time is needed. While there is no doubt that playful moments have value fleetingly, in matters of seconds (see section 5.5), to harvest all the fruits of play sufficient time is needed to:

- transfer to a physical state where stress is relieved and the parasympathetic neural system switches on; similar to the benefits of mindfulness and through deep breathing;
- “play out” traumatic events, conflicts, feelings of weakness, loneliness, helplessness;

<sup>58</sup> Chan, A. & Siegel, D.J. (2018) ‘Play and the Default Mode Network: Interpersonal neurobiology, self and creativity’, in Marks-Tarlow, T., Solomon, M ( Siegel, D.J. (eds) *Play and Creativity in Psychotherapy*, New York & London: W.W. Norton and Company, p. 39-63.

<sup>59</sup> Winnicott, D.W (1971) *Playing and Reality*, London: Tavistock Publications Ltd.

- move enough for the body to strengthen and develop;
- be together enough with other children to synchronise to each other, talk, love, fight and learn everything which is needed for that;
- try and fail and try and fail...;
- feel happy and free, which is anyway an ultimate goal of a personal life.

How much time is enough for play in the school day is hard to say. Children would ask for endless hours, while the school curriculum places much structure limits. CAPS project members feel that at least an hour (60 minutes) of undisturbed time each day would be the best. That means time, which is not dedicated to anything else, like lunch. Playing for 20 minutes, having lunch within the well-regulated diner area, and then going back to play is therefore not ideal. Play is usually not like reading a book: we can continue where we dropped, as it has special mindsets in all of its participating children. However, we recognise that making such a radical change may be difficult, so schools should commit to making as much undisturbed time as possible available for playing. Two sessions of 20 minutes is still much more than having no playtime.

The Quality Criteria recognise that schools may find a whole 60 minutes in one uninterrupted session may be difficult to achieve, and so they state:

A minimum standard would be that 12.5% of the school day should have times for playing when there are no other demands, with at least one block of time for children to engage in playing uninterrupted. An aspiration would be for 20%. So, for a 6 hour school day, this would mean a minimum of 45 minutes and an aspiration to achieve at least 72 minutes.

'Other demands' includes, for example, eating snacks or lunch, queuing for lunch, and care routines for Disabled children.

### **5.3 The importance of honouring times for play**

In school, the children's time is highly regulated. There are the lesson times, and studying hours, which take up most of the school day. Recess / break time is a short period in-between study times, which has to be divided between play, eating, going to toilet, maybe going to another classroom, changing clothes to PE lessons, etc. As recess is about 10-20 minutes at most, often only a few minutes are left for play between the classes. However, these are still crucial for relieving stress and having a break from focused attention; this is what we call rest. Also, these are the periods when children are not told what to do, and have some independence. Recess is a biological and social need for children (and adults too).

Still it is a common experience that teachers (naturally not all of them) look at these times of the day as a kind of gift for children, which can be taken away without any further justification by

- extending the lesson into the recess / break time;
- starting earlier;
- or punishing children by taking away their recess / break times for perceived bad behaviour or because the school find the children's behaviour difficult to manage at break times.

This approach is not only negative from the aspect of play, it is also very counter-effective: children without recess, play and moving will be less focused and attentive, more fidgety, and all in all less

well-behaved. In terms of difficult behaviour at break and play times, our colleagues at OPAL have found that making changes to play times, through changing the space and the culture, have a significant impact on poor behaviour. Using a playwork methodology is at the heart of this and is described in more detail in Chapter 7.

## 5.4 Playful pedagogy and what it entails

Learning and cognitive research has proved scientifically what Plato already knew well: learning by doing is the most effective way for learning. Still our education systems focus on ‘transferring knowledge / material’, which is set in national curricula. Modern pedagogical methodology and approaches are already built upon experiential learning, like cooperative learning, project method, inquiry-based learning. These approaches are already a small step away from playful pedagogy.

It is hard to define what pedagogical method can be called playful – a self-explaining definition can be that it is an approach that makes children feel they are playing, so that they enter the special ‘transient space’ for play.

There are already several terms / approaches / methods around play and learning, such as:

- Serious play: playful methods for innovating, designing, creative problem-solving. These can be simulations, role plays, improvisations, problem-solving exercises.
- Drama-based pedagogy: socio-dramatic and imaginative play.
- Educational games: set-rule exercises to achieve an educational goal.
- Board games: set-rule and set-route games (either paper-based or online).
- Gamification: when a whole process is turned into a game, for example by collecting points, or building characters etc.

There is much overlap between these categories. For example, a socio-economic improvisation is categorised both as serious play and as drama. A specific game can be part of a simulation game but in itself an educational game. Simulation games and (cooperative) board games are also very close in nature, with less open outcome for board games. Gamification can contain all of the above. The common factor between these approaches and methods is that in all of them the participating children (young people or even adults) are more emotionally involved, and this extra emotion (and therefore motivation) makes the learning efficient.

It is also important to put stress that all these methods take children into the ‘transient’ space, which is more than their imagination, but less than a reality. Being not real makes it a safe place for trial and error as well as a place for trying new behaviours.

**Therefore it is important to underline that evaluation from this transient space cannot be exchanged into marks or grades. When there are real stakes at risk, then it is not in the transient space, and so it is not play anymore.**

## 5.5 Playful moments throughout the school day

As discussed in Chapter 4, play is not only a discrete time and space-bound activity, it will erupt whenever the conditions allow. Children are always alert for possibilities to enliven life in the classroom, in the queue for dinner, in the corridor. Sometimes, these playful moments are understood as disruptive or cheeky. A Play-friendly School recognises the potential of these moments for experiencing joy and togetherness. This does not mean anything goes, and there will be occasions when banter and jokes are not appropriate, but a Play-friendly School sees these as the exception rather than the rule and is not threatened by them. An example can be seen in this extract from an article that tells a story of 'Circle Time' in a Finnish kindergarten, where the normal patterns of behaviour and power relationships are momentarily disturbed through the injection of nonsense, and the teacher's response helps to co-create a sense of togetherness without a major threat to her management of the space.<sup>60</sup>

The kindergarten teacher, Sara, begins the roll call: 'Magnus?'

Magnus replies: Yes, [here].

Sara: Peter?

Peter: No, [not here], I am down inside Magnus.

Peter, Magnus, Tine, Natalia and several other children nearly split their sides laughing. Peter, too, smiles at his success.

Sara asks, with a twinkle: Are you down inside Magnus?

Peter asks: Yes, isn't that a rather silly thing to say?

Sara: Frankly, yes.

When the roll call reaches Katrine she says that she, too, is down inside Magnus. The children laugh.

Sara points out in a surprised voice: Now there are two children down inside Magnus.

Nadja: Then he must give birth.

Tine: Two in his belly, no, two in his ears (the other children laugh)... no, two in his nose (all the children giggle and laugh) ... no, two in his little peter

Peter continues: No, two in his bum.

Peter and Magnus laugh so much that they almost fall off their chairs.

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<sup>60</sup> Hannikainen, M. (2001) 'Playful Actions as a Sign of Togetherness in Day Care Centres.' *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 9(2), p. 127.

## Chapter 6: Quality Criterion 4 - Children have sufficient space for playing

### Quality Criterion 4: Children have sufficient space for playing

- 4.1. We make as much outdoor space as possible available for playing in all weathers through design and the availability of outdoor clothes and footwear
- 4.2. The physical environment supports a wide range of forms of play, including risk taking
- 4.3. The physical space is as diverse as possible, with different heights, materials, objects, features, slopes, etc.
- 4.4. Children can build and adapt spaces for playing, rest, refuge, observation and socialising
- 4.5. Children can be physically active in a variety of ways
- 4.6. A wide range of plentiful fixed and replenishable resources is available for playing in variable ways
- 4.7. We pay attention to and work with moments of playfulness

The UNCRC General Comment 17 has this to say about the physical environment in schools:

States parties should aim to ensure the provision of adequate indoor and outdoor space to facilitate play, sports, games and drama, during and around school hours; active promotion of equal opportunities for both girls and boys to play; adequate sanitation facilities for boys and girls; playgrounds, play landscapes and equipment that are safe and properly and regularly inspected; playgrounds with appropriate boundaries; equipment and spaces designed to enable all children, including children with disabilities, to participate equally; play areas which afford opportunities for all forms of play; location and design of play areas with adequate protection and with the involvement of children in the design and development.

Creating conditions that support play requires paying attention to the culture and atmosphere of the space as well as its physical features. The two are interdependent, but they have been separated here to make it easier to address details. The physical features of space and the resources available for playing do need to be planned and maintained; equally, the right atmosphere has to be co-created where children feel safe and able to play, and staff supervising children's play appreciate ways to support rather than direct or unnecessarily constrain children's play. Whilst this chapter looks mostly at the physical aspects, it is inevitable that the social and cultural aspects also arise. This chapter looks mostly at planning and modifying the space, whereas the following and final chapter considers the atmosphere and culture when the space is in use by the children. It introduces a number of conceptual tools that might be helpful in addressing the dilemma of planning for play that is self-organised.

## 6.1 Thinking about space

We usually think of space, if we think about it at all, as an arrangement of landscape features and material objects that provide a neutral container for human life. Spaces are designed to fulfil functions: classrooms, railway stations, streets, playgrounds, parks. An alternative way to think about space is to view it as relational rather than set apart from human existence. From this perspective, spaces are always in the process of being produced through the relations between people, bodies, desires, mood, material and symbolic objects and so on. That may sound a little abstract, so it is illustrated here with a story:

I am travelling on a train through central London. It is the kind of train with sliding doors that open on to a large vestibule with a pole in the middle. It is early afternoon, so the vestibule area is empty of its rush hour commuters. A young girl boards the train. She is about 6 or 7 years old, and she is wearing a full skirt and sparkly shoes. The pole in the middle of the vestibule area is irresistible. She grabs it and does a little twirl around it, then let's go and does a full twirl and her skirt billows.<sup>61</sup>

This is an everyday moment of embodied joy, infectious to those who were aware of it: several smiles of recognition could be seen amongst the travellers. Just for a fleeting moment, the train vestibule became an enchanted play space, produced through relations between lots of things, including the girl's own embodied desire to feel the twirl, the empty space, the pole, the knowledge that her skirt will billow and her shoes sparkle if she twirls, and the anticipated pleasure that offers.

What this illustrates is that space is far more than just its physical features. Indeed, children's relationship with space is such that they will seek out ways to be that might disturb adult order of time and space, although rarely in ways that completely overthrow that order, which soon returns once the moments of playing have passed. A train vestibule is not intended as a dance stage, for example.

This raises questions for planning and designing for play. If we understand play as emerging in opportunistic and spontaneous ways from whatever is to hand, often in ways that use the space other than for its designed intention, what does this mean for planning, design and modification?

## 6.2 The production of space

The first conceptual tool to introduce comes from French philosopher Henri Lefebvre and his work on the production of space. He suggested that the production of space happens through the relations between three registers of space: *conceived space* (what is in the heads of the planners, designers and the mapmakers), *perceived space* (sometimes called *spatial practice*: the ways that space works, usually in line with the designers' intentions) and lived space (moments where life is worth living, the space of love, art and of course, play – this often disrupts planners intentions for space). This is helpful for thinking about how space works in two ways. The first is that it recognizes the power relations in the production of space. For example, roads are a major aspect of urban planning and this shows how cities are designed and planned in ways that keep the economy going

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<sup>61</sup> This story is taken from Russell, W. (2018) Thinking a little differently about resilience and play, in W. Russell and K. Schuur (eds) *The Strength of European Diversity for Building Children's Resilience through Play and Drama: A collection of articles from the EU Erasmus Plus ARTPAD project 2015-2018*

rather than in ways that support children playing out. Similarly, the design of schools is intended to support ways of managing and educating large numbers of children; mostly the design works, occasionally spatial practices of order are momentarily disturbed through moments in lived space. The second is that it helps us to think critically about the way we plan space. In his book on improving play at play times in primary schools, Michael Follett gives the example of the trim trail.<sup>62</sup> He says that schools often buy trim trails because they think they will provide opportunities for challenge and for physical activity. They assume that because they are being sold by the play industry, and because lots of other schools have them, they must have value; however, the play industry will provide whatever sells. Observation shows that when they are new, the trim trails are very popular, often needing adults to supervise turns and hurry children along the linear trail, but very soon the novelty wears off, evening out at 5-8% of the children playing on the trim trail for about 5-10% of their playtime. Any challenge is soon overcome, and the equipment then becomes boring unless an alternative use can be found for it, one that would possibly incur the disapproval of adult supervisors. Often, they are left abandoned or just used as places to sit. The kinds of physical movement they support is limited and can be offered more cheaply with other materials. This shows how in conceived space, the trim trail, coming with a badge of value from the industry (a power relation), is seen as something that will provide risk and physical activity; in perceived space, this perhaps is the case for a short time and under close supervision; in lived space, children wanting to use the trim trail for their own play productions may be reprimanded for not using it ‘properly’.

### 6.3 Affordances

Developing further that tendency for adults to buy equipment that they think will serve a function (physical activity, imaginative play, etc.), Michael Follett says:

Children enter a play environment as explorers with no map. They want to explore every aspect of the terrain and discover its every potential for enrichment of their play. The ... potential for play that any feature possesses has very little to do with what it looks like or what intention an adult has because the nature of play is rooted in the child’s intent and the child’s desire to be the creative agent behind their own actions. This potential is sometimes called ‘affordance’ because it refers to the opportunities it affords rather than looks or intended function.<sup>63</sup>

The term ‘affordance’ was coined by ecological psychologist JJ Gibson to refer to what an environment offers to individuals. It is about the individual’s perceptual responses to environmental features and will differ from person to person. The concept is based on a very particular understanding of the relationship between an individual and the environment: Gibson saw this as a reciprocal relationship, one bound up in an understanding of perception that is relational and dynamic. Individuals approach space seeking the answer to the question ‘what does this space offer me?’ affordances are therefore unique, relational and reciprocal. For example, a hill *may* afford rolling or running down, but this will not be what every child wants to do there. A low wall *may* afford balancing along, cracks in pavements *may* afford playing games of not-stepping-on-the-cracks.

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<sup>62</sup> Follett, M. (2017) *Creating Excellence in Primary School Playtimes: How to make 20% of the school day 100% better*, London: Jessica Kingsley.

<sup>63</sup> As above, p. 108

The concept has been further broadened to consider the social (and power) affordances of spaces in the work of Marketta Kyttä.<sup>64</sup> She talks about the *actualisation* of affordances and sets these within a socio-cultural context. She suggests that within the overall potential affordances an environment offers, there are three ‘fields of action’ that define the rules that determine whether affordances are actualised through activity:

- firstly, the *Field of Promoted Action*, where activities are socially approved according to place, time and manner;
- then there is the *Field of Constrained Action*, where activities are restricted or deemed socially unacceptable, or the environment constrains certain actions;
- overlapping these two and in the space in between them is the *Field of Free Action*, which includes both activities that are socially promoted and socially constrained. Children can actualise affordances that are constrained both by chance (through independent discovery) and deliberately. This is sometimes understood by some adults as misbehaviour.

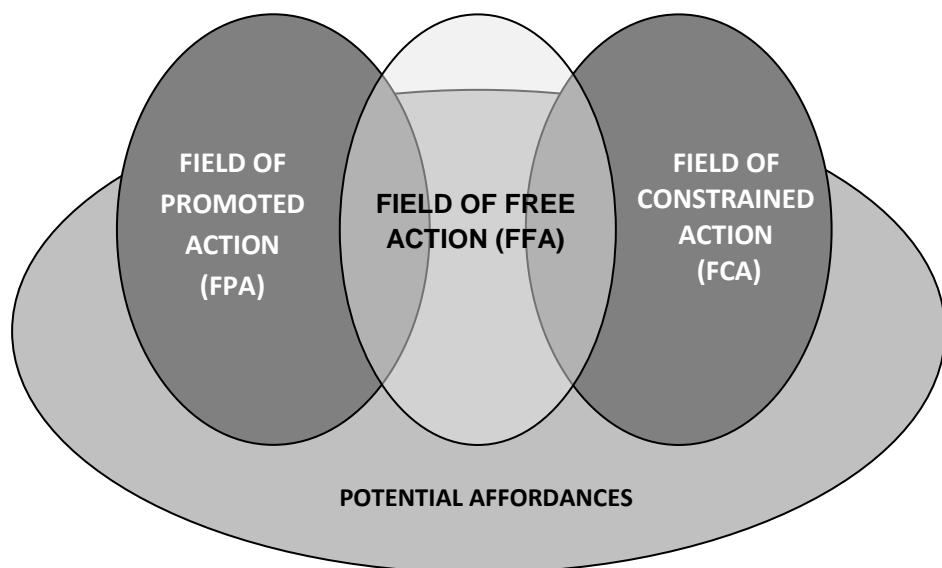


Figure adapted from Kyttä (2004)

In their play, children often move from one field of action to another, and they are also likely to try and enlarge the field of free action. We can see how this concept of affordances links both the physical and cultural environment, since the fields of action will relate to the kinds of playing and/or behaviour that is constrained or promoted within the play space. This thinking also helps to understand the idea of play as a disposition, of how playful moments can arise whenever conditions allow, often in a way that disturbs adult orderings of time and space. It is important to recognise that playworkers cannot provide a field of free action (as this would then render it a field of promoted action).

<sup>64</sup> Kyttä, M. (2004) 'The Extent of Children's Independent Mobility and the Number of Actualised Affordances as Criteria for Child-friendly Environments', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 24, pp. 179-198

## 6.4 The theory of loose parts

Key to current thinking on quality play environments is a concept from the 1970s, namely Nicholson's theory of loose parts. As with the best theories, this is simple but fundamental. It recognises the need for environments to be dynamic rather than static and for children to be able to make adaptations to the environment. It also acknowledges and supports the spontaneity and unpredictability of play. 'Loose parts' refers to anything that can be moved or changed; in the play space this could be tyres, pallets, wood, cardboard boxes, string, sand, water, leaves and twigs, earth, paper, fabric – the list is endless. The two key features of loose parts are that they can be used in an infinite number of ways and they are in plentiful supply. Nicholson describes his theory:

In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it ...

It does not require much imagination to realise that most environments that do not work (i.e. do not work in terms of the human interaction and involvement...)... do not do so because they do not meet the "loose parts" requirement; instead they are clean, static and impossible to play around with. What has happened is that adults in the form of professional artists, architects, landscape architects and planners have had all the fun playing with their own materials, concepts and planning-alternatives, and then builders have had all the fun building the environments out of real materials; and thus has all the fun and creativity been stolen.<sup>65</sup>

Environmental modification is something that can be carried out either by children or adults. Children will do this as a part of the play process; adults' modifications may often be more deliberate and based on an understanding of how the play space is working at any given time. Modifications might be in terms of a change to the layout of the play space (inside or outside) or the introduction of new parts, whether that be equipment, tools or materials, or the injection of surprise, something unexpected. Modifications could be in direct response to particular play frames; or proactive and experimental, a kind of 'what if?...' stance. There needs to be a balance between supporting children's attraction to the new and the unknown (neophilia) and the need for familiarity, repetition, or respect for a long term play frame that requires stability in that part of the environment.

The extract from an observation below, of a play centre in Nottingham, shows a playworker unobtrusively making new parts available in a play frame where children were playing with a large puddle:

The children had dug a moat around the outside of the play area and then built a diverting mechanism (with a handy piece of hosepipe – I wonder where that came from?) from the taps in the toilet, and routed the water towards the moat and filled it. On the day I visited, there was a large puddle that had been dug out, and the water routed, by means of makeshift dams, from the moat into the puddle. I'd say it was about a metre in diameter and quite deep in parts – certainly over the ankle deep.

The game consisted of trying to jump across the puddle without getting wet. The puddle was too wide to jump across in one go, so a variety of half-way landing points was needed. The playworkers were aware of this and at various intervals would deposit new 'props' nearby the puddle, sometimes close, sometimes further away but in view, saying nothing and walking away.

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<sup>65</sup> Nicholson, S. (1972) The Theory of Loose Parts: An important principle for design methodology, *Studies in Design Education and Craft*, 4(2), pp5-14

These props consisted of planks of wood (remnants donated from a resident after laying laminate flooring), old cushions and even a broken full-sized fibreglass canoe.

By placing the loose parts in view of the children, the playworkers were in effect creating a field of promoted action; the children's fields of free action would overlap – they may use those resources for their game or in other ways. The point is to co-create a space that is as open as possible to whatever might emerge. This is easier to facilitate when there are plentiful resources that can be used in multiple ways and that can be easily replaced when they are no longer safe or effective for use.

## 6.5 IMEE and space auditing

Having introduced three conceptual tools that help us to understand how space works and how we can leave it as open as possible for spontaneous and varied play forms to emerge, we now move on to a specific auditing and planning tool that may be helpful. We are very grateful to the author, Bob Hughes for allowing us to use this approach, first published in 1996.<sup>66</sup> Hughes' starting point is that it is the responsibility of adults to design, maintain and modify spaces that work for children's play. Whilst consulting with children may feel democratic and inclusive, he sees this as problematic for four reasons:

- As with the rest of us, if children are invited to comment on what they do not know or have not experienced, then the outcomes risk being adult, or media, led.
- Whilst involving children in the provision process may feel right, it undermines the play process; it violates children's privacy and it interrupts their intimate and total physical and psychological interaction with the rest of the environment.
- Consciously thinking about playing and play environments spoils the spontaneous, instinctive and imaginative joy associated with play.
- Engaging children in play environment design and development puts the onus of failure to deliver or maintain quality on children rather than where it belongs, on adults.

Hughes suggests we should use a combination of four sources of information for making judgements:

- **Intuition:** seen as a valid guide, intuition allows us to see things from the perspective of insight and instinct, rather than experience. Intuition complements knowledge and understanding; it is an expression of what 'feels right'. The use of intuition to inform and guide practice is an example of a meta-cognitive skill that is used in analysis and making judgments. It is generally tacit and difficult to articulate.
- **Memory:** our own memories of playing should be accessed and developed in order to remind us of the feeling (rather than the content) of playing. As we apply our memory it is important to recognise that we have all been children and experienced our own unique childhood with its particular joys, difficulties and challenges. We should also remember that we remember our childhoods through an adult lens, often tinged with nostalgia: every generation of adults thinks that their childhoods were better than the current generation of

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<sup>66</sup> Hughes, B. (1996) *Play Environments: A question of quality*, London: PlayLink.

children's childhoods. This memory exercise is not an attempt to re-create our own childhood play but to re-engage with the feelings associated with playing.

- **Experience:** as a complement to intuition and memory, this refers to our experience of what works and what does not in our adult work with children at play. For example, your observations of children's play would form a part of your experience. Over time, this would lead to a greater understanding of children's relationships with each other, adults and the play environment.
- **Evidence:** by this, Hughes is referring to the literature from a number of disciplines providing a theoretical base for supporting children's play. As we saw in Chapter 3, there are many contesting theories about the nature and value of children's play, and so we need to bring a critical perspective to this. Nevertheless, there is a growing body of literature on designing, maintaining and modifying play environments and on playwork that can be helpful. Although Hughes talks about evidence from the literature, we can also draw on the conceptual tools introduced above: Lefebvre's spatial triad, Kyttä's fields of action, and the theory of loose parts.

Hughes presents a number of lists that adults can generate that help develop an understanding of how the space works and what modifications can be made to make it more open for playing in multiple ways. These are reproduced here:

#### **List 1: a quality play environment: a child's perspective**

Using IMEE we can draw on a large body of material to help us reflect on what children might expect from a play environment, both in terms of what they want to do in it and in terms of the atmosphere, or ambience, they would expect from it. From this, a prioritised set of statements framed from the child's perspective can be developed.

Starting with the statement THE PLAY SPACE I WANT WOULD BE ONE WHERE I COULD ..., using your own IMEE, work individually to come up with about 20 conditions for your own preferred play environment. Spend some time doing this – a good 20-30 minutes. Examples might be things like: hide, climb, sing, dress up, be with friends, feel safe, be alone ...

Share your lists with others in the group. A facilitator should record them onto a flipchart/whiteboard, grouping repetitions and similar items.

#### **List 2: a quality play environment: an adult's perspective**

The group considers the child-based lists and works to identify conceptual themes that run through them. These may be things such as: variety, relationships, safety, excitement, movement, control, modification. You can see how these themes may indeed be contradictory.

#### **Lists 3 and 4: a quality play environment: child-based questioning**

Using lists 1 and 2 as prompts, develop two further lists: ATTRACTIONS TO PLAY and CONSTRAINTS TO PLAY. List 3 should focus on questions that relate to the opportunities for playing that the environment affords children. Examples might be 'Can I climb trees here?' or 'Are there quiet places?' List 4 should focus on factors that might inhibit playing or might intrude into the process, however aesthetically attractive the space may be. Examples might be 'Might I be bullied?' or 'Will I get told off if I go on the grass in the wet?' Try and make these lists as comprehensive as possible in the time available.

### Lists 5 and 6: Content and ambience indicators

When lists 3 and 4 have been completed, the group goes through another process of reducing each question down to its core inquiry. For example, ‘Can I climb trees?’ might be reduced to content indicators of, say, height, physical challenge, natural features. These are CONTENT INDICATORS for list 5. Similarly, the question ‘Might I be bullied?’ could be reduced to safety, as an AMBIENCE INDICATOR, or ‘Will I get told off if I go on the grass in the wet?’ could generate an ambience indicator or openness or permission.

Content indicators are the physical ingredients of a quality play environment. This questioning process will generate a useful list and we can also draw on the evidence from the design literature on what works: this is explored in section 6.6 below. Ambience indicators will help to inform the school’s work on Quality Criterion 5, explored further in the next chapter.

The final lists produced, together with the shared knowledge of the process of arriving at lists 5 and 6, can be used to audit the school’s space and draw up a list of actions that can help make the space more open to children’s play.

### 6.6 Critical cartography

The IMEE questions can be used to audit space and to check if the space is working. Critical cartography is an approach to documenting how the space works on an ongoing basis in ways that can be used to maintain and re-enchant the space, for reflective practice and organisation development. The documentation can also be used as evidence for how your school meets the Quality Criteria. It works with the twin ideas of account-ability and response-ability:

- **Account-ability:** this is about taking account of the movements, navigations and rhythms that support conditions for playing. Given the relational nature of space, it is less a perfect record and more open to working with the messiness of the world, paying attention to the mundane and the everyday.
- **Response-ability:** this refers to the ability to be responsive to what is happening in ways that can maintain a playful atmosphere. This is done through discussing the gathered documentation and holding up the habits and routines of the space to critical scrutiny. Key question to ask here are ‘what if?’ and ‘what more?’. ‘What if’ questions embrace experimentation, they are about injecting some kind of disturbance into the space to try something a little different, not with any preconceived expectation of what will happen. ‘What more?’ questions aim to think about other ways of maintaining the playfulness of the space.

These processes are not separate; changes may be agreed during formal sessions to review the documentation, but they are just as likely to occur in the thick of practice, arising spontaneously through the wisdom gathered over time through the cartographic methods.

Critical cartography works with the idea of mapping, not only to produce a representation of the space, but also in terms of mapping its possibilities. A key principle is that it moves away from looking at what play is or even why it is important and looks more at how it happens (see Chapter 4).

It focuses less on what individual children might gain and more on developing the capacity to pay attention to the conditions that support the emergence of playing.

### 6.6.1 Approaches to documentation

The process of gathering documentation should be undertaken by those working with the children during play times. Time should also be set aside, say once a month, for discussing the documentation.

- **Start with a map:** A starting point for developing the documentation is to create a map of the space. This works best during a meeting of the team, perhaps as a part of the course, if appropriate. To begin with, staff create a map of the space on their own. They then come together and share their maps, creating a large joint map. This process is valuable as it shows the things that some people miss out, or what has more prominence in some maps than others. This is important because it begins to surface people's relationship with the space. Try and find somewhere to keep the large map, perhaps sticking it to a piece of cardboard or a wall. Take a photo of the map and print off A4 and A3 versions. The maps will be populated with forms of documentation.
- **Significant spaces:** The next step is to ask staff to take photos of three areas of the whole space that have some special meaning for them. It may be somewhere they enjoy supervising or have special conversations with the children. It may be a site of anxiety or frequent conflict. There are many reasons for areas being significant and they are all important. These spaces would be very personal, and would reflect each adult's space preferences, for example, a sport-oriented teacher may choose the spaces where children play football or other games, but this may be a site of anxiety for someone who worries about children getting hurt by the ball or through collisions. For someone else it might be a quiet area, yet for others this may be a boring place. For those who want to see as much as possible, they would position themselves in a good vantage point, and this would then be a site of significance. Often people choose 'liminal' spaces – thresholds between one kind of space and another, for examples doorways or gates; these may be sites of joy but they may also be where conflicts arise. They then position their photos on the map and talk about why they chose those spaces. The conversation will give rise to stories about what has happened in these places, building an affective picture of how the space works. Sometimes, these conversations also give rise to suggestions for changing the space to see what might happen.
- **Sharing stories of what happens in the space:** Stories bring the map to life. They can be written on post-its and positioned on the map. Once the map is full, you can take a photo and start again. Each story is one example of the space and shows in micro detail how it works. They may be stories of wonder and enchantment with children's play; they may be sad stories, or stories about conflict. Working with stories is a way of building a collective wisdom about the space: multiple ways of seeing how it works, many examples, each one unique but together they can form a pattern.
- **Map flows and movements:** Using the smaller printed maps, you can trace the movements of a particular child or member of staff, or even an object as you observe them. Make the lines as detailed as possible – every meander, every detour, every stopping point. You can

annotate the lines. These lines help to move beyond the static maps and bring it to life, showing the flows, forces and rhythms of the space and its relational nature.

- **Use all the senses:** You can of course use your eyes to observe what is going on. Sight is our dominant sense, and it also helps to move beyond this. What sounds? What do some areas feel like to touch? What smells are there in the space? You can take audio recordings (check issues of permission before you do this) and ask colleagues which part of the space you were in. Sometimes, just listening to the sound of the space without seeing what is going on foregrounds sounds you were not aware of before – again, these contribute to the rhythms and atmosphere of the space.
- **Use video:** Again, make sure you have the required permissions to do this and are aware of how and where the videos can be shared. Situating a camera on one area for a full session and then watching it speeded up can show the ways that children, staff and objects move through the space. Go-Pro or other head worn cameras can offer interesting perspectives. Sometimes, children will be interested in the filming and this will alter how they play, sometimes they may ask to do some filming.
- **Be creative:** There are many more ways you can add to the map. One staff team do a comic strip, one playful moment each day. At another site, the staff pretended to be David Attenborough, recording their commentary of the behaviour of children as a rare endangered species, particularly the weird phenomenon of this thing called ‘playing’.

Sometimes it is hard to document during a session, and in some places staff are not given time to document afterwards. Some teams have found that using phone apps such as WhatsApp means they can share stories instantly and fairly easily. This process of documenting works best if there is one person who can facilitate the process, encouraging the documentation process and facilitating scheduled discussions.

## 6.7 Designing space: a rich play environment

The indicators in Criterion 4 guide schools towards design features that collective wisdom suggests are likely to be successful in terms of creating conditions that can support play (both content and ambience indicators). These can be summarised as:

- material richness and physical diversity
- loose parts and modifiable space
- spaces to hide and survey
- spaces within spaces; networking of spaces
- flexibility
- seasonality and access to nature
- the opportunity to play with the senses (sight, sound, smell, touch and taste); with one’s identity (girl/boy, leader/follower, etc); with concepts (such as death or war or marriage) and with the elements (earth, water, air and fire)<sup>67</sup>
- an overall playful feel.

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<sup>67</sup> This is what Bob Hughes refers to as the playwork curriculum

In terms of children's responses to the overall space, we can also add the four preferences of landscapes that environmental psychologists Rachel and Stephen Kaplan suggest: complexity (there is enough to hold interest but not overwhelm), coherence (the space hangs together), legibility (the space can be read, it is possible to find one's way around) and mystery (the promise of more to come, as yet unknown).<sup>68</sup> Michael Follett points out the importance of appreciating that children use the whole landscape for play rather than isolated zones or pieces of equipment; it is useful to pay attention to how children might journey from one part of the space to another. For example, tunnels or willow tunnels, hills and so on may be sites of interest and may also be routes linking other sites. He also recommends addressing the need for a range of social spaces where children can be together or alone.

Play Wales<sup>69</sup> suggest the following ingredients of a rich play environment:

- **other children and young people** - with a choice to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, fall out, and resolve conflict
- **the natural world** - weather, the seasons, bushes, trees, plants, insects, animals, mud
- **loose parts** - natural and man-made materials that can be manipulated, moved and adapted, built and demolished
- **the natural elements** - earth, air, fire and water
- **challenge and risk taking** - both on a physical and emotional level
- **playing with identity** - role play and dressing up
- **movement** - running, jumping, climbing, balancing, rolling
- **rough and tumble** - play fighting
- **the senses** - sounds, tastes, textures, smells and sights
- **feelings** - pain, joy, confidence, fear, anger, contentment, boredom, fascination, happiness, grief, rejection, acceptance, sadness, pride, frustration.

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<sup>68</sup> Kaplan, R. and Kaplan, S. (1989) *The Experience of Nature: A psychological perspective*.

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/richplayenvironment>

## Chapter 7: Quality Criterion 5 - The school culture supports children's play

### Quality Criterion 5: The school culture supports children's play

- 5.1. There is an overall playful feel at play times
- 5.2. Staff and parents/carers are supported to develop knowledge and practices that can support playful pedagogies and children's self-organised play
- 5.3. Staff work sensitively to support playing rather than unnecessarily constraining it

It is worth saying again that the Quality Criteria 3, 4 and 5 (sufficient time and space and a school culture that supports children's play) do not operate in isolation. Chapter 5 considered the importance of making sufficient time available for play when there are no other demands on children and Chapter 6 looked at how space works. Both showed how they need to be embedded in a school culture and ethos that respects children's right to play. Becoming a Play-friendly School requires this, and for some schools, this may mean a shift in the culture of the school generally. Our experience has shown that schools that make changes to play times often find that the shift in playground culture begins to permeate other aspects of school life. This chapter revisits some of the concepts introduced earlier, and then looks in more detail at how a playwork methodology can support play at playtimes.

### 7.1 A whole-school approach: ongoing processes

Chapter 3 looked at how to involve all stakeholders in becoming a Play-friendly School. This needs to continue so that the changes made are sustainable. One of the best ways to do this is to find ways of involving staff, families and community in school work to support play. This may be perhaps through asking parents and caregivers or local businesses to donate 'loose parts' for play times: things like old kitchenware, or computer keyboards, or wheeled suitcases (that are very popular as playthings!), or tyres, cardboard boxes, pallets and so on. Other schools have held assemblies or whole-school meetings to discuss playtimes, involving the children, so that teaching staff can maintain a sense of connectedness and of how things are working at play times. Having a dedicated space on the school website, or using social media just about play times has also proved popular – parents and caregivers, communities, businesses and teachers alike can see what goes on and can ask questions or make comments as well as know how to support.

In addition, it is important to seek opportunities for professional development for staff and information/training for broader stakeholders. You might want to use some of the material from the Trainer's Guide for this, perhaps allocating time in official professional development calendars, holding twilight sessions or open days.

## 7.2 An overall playful feel

As the Quality Criteria state:

It may seem strange to have as an indicator something that is not possible to measure, but in a sense, that is the point. If a space supports playing, it is felt in the atmosphere, and this develops from a sense of licence and permission that it is ok to play. Becoming attuned to the overall feel can be developed using some of the critical cartographic methods introduced in Chapter 6. This requires a willingness to be open to sensing the space beyond the desire to rationalise it into words. Many teachers and playground supervisors will be familiar with the sensation that something has shifted in the atmosphere and therefore needs adult attention. This is generally when there is a sense that something is about to get out of hand. What is equally important is developing the capacity to feel when the space is working well, to experience the joy and satisfaction from the particular ways that children's bodies and desires, landscape features, material objects, culture, relationships and so on can all come together to form moments of playfulness. It is clear that these assemblages include the adults responsible and their approach (both explicit and tacit) to supporting children's play.

Understanding more about a playwork approach can be useful here.

## 7.3 A playwork approach

As explained in Chapter 1, the CAPS project includes a 'transfer of knowledge' regarding the UK model of playwork, a way of working to support children's play. A general introduction to the ethos is given there, together with the Playwork Principles, the officially adopted UK-wide set of principles that outline the ethical framework of playwork methodology. Two key aspects of playwork theory that have informed the Playwork Principles, Bob Hughes' Play Types and the play cycle introduced by Gordon Sturrock and Perry Else, are introduced in Chapter 4. A key aspect of the playwork approach is that it strives to support self-organised play as much as possible, bringing what is terms a 'low intervention-high response'<sup>70</sup> way of working. As much as possible, children should be able to engage with each other and the space in a spontaneous manner. This does create some tensions for playwork practice in any context, but perhaps particularly in school settings. How far can children do as they please? What about risk, conflicts, getting dirty, harm to themselves, others or school property? What about the forms of playing that make adults anxious or offended? What if children want to play with the adults? These issues are debated here using more material from the work of Gordon Sturrock and Perry Else, looking at concepts of intervention and adulteration.

## 7.4 Intervention and adulteration

Supporting children's freely chosen, intrinsically motivated and personally driven play as adults often becomes a challenge for those just becoming familiar with playwork (and also for more experienced playworkers). We have discussed earlier in this handbook the importance of sufficient play time and the role of the space in supporting or constraining children's play. But the role of the adult doesn't

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<sup>70</sup> NPFA, PLAYLINK, Children's Play Council (2000) *Best Play: What play provision should do for children*, <http://www.playengland.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/best-play.pdf>

end at creating the temporal and spatial conditions for play (Quality Criteria 3 and 4), it also requires a continuous self-reflection regarding the actions the adult take during the actual playtime.

Adulteration<sup>71</sup> is a term that describes how adults have a tendency to intervene in children's free play, 'contaminating' the play space with their own agendas. This might include the urge to teach or educate the children, to save them from harm or to simply dominate them, among others. While often the intention behind intervening is coming from the right place, we have to be conscious about how our actions affect children's play and whether they are truly necessary. Sarah Thomson's study of school playgrounds<sup>72</sup> found that adults try to control children's playtime for a number of different reasons:

- **Policing play** ("Play nicely please"): Adults often have the expectation that children should act 'properly' when playing, and if they deem students' behaviour to be unacceptable, they admonish them. Of course, we don't want children to be unkind, but sometimes what seems from the outside as rudeness, it is friendly and playful banter and togetherness.
- **Risky play** ("Be careful and don't hurt yourselves"): Some of children's play is often seen as too risky, so adults follow their natural instinct and stop things before anything bad happens. The problem comes when nearly all types of play are banned as they might cause accidents: no climbing on benches (as they might fall down), no running around (as they might slip), no play-fighting (as they might hurt each other), etc. And if we ban all these activities, how are children supposed to learn their own capabilities and risk management?
- **Unhygienic play** ("Don't get dirty"): When children use their imagination and their environment for play, they sometimes get dirty. Using twigs, berries, playing in the sand and 'baking a cake' are delightful for children, but adults often discourage these forms of play, as children might get dirty. We seriously hamper the spontaneity in children's play if we ban them from using what they find in the space. (See section 3.2 where we talk about how schools can support children to play without worrying about making their school uniforms dirty through the provision of appropriate clothing, footwear and storage.)
- **Play that is "worthwhile"**: Another adult agenda that manipulates children's free play is when adults say they should do activities that are meaningful or useful – either for their mind or their physical well-being. Playing for the sake of playing is often seen as a wasted opportunity, so children are encouraged to play for the sake of learning something. Also, sometimes there is a serious disconnection between the intention and the actual intervention: adults discourage children from running around (as it is chaotic and so deemed dangerous), but they are encouraged to run in circles during a PE lesson.
- **Play as a "hassle"**: Some forms of play cause hassle from the adult's perspective. They don't want to see for example conflicts over the ownership of toys, so they would rather ban children bringing their own toys with them, as they tend to cause these kinds of conflicts.

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<sup>71</sup> Taken from Sturrock, G. and Else, P. (1998) *The playground as therapeutic space: playwork as healing*. ('The Colorado Paper').

<sup>72</sup> Thomson, S. (2014) Adulterated Play: An empirical discussion surrounding adults' involvement with children's play in the primary school playground, *Journal of Playwork Practice*, 1(1), pp.5-21.

- **Play as an “obsession”:** When adults feel that certain play types are repeated over and over again, they might want to intervene in order to make children’s play more diverse. However, children are good at finding ways to continue playing in their preferred way: Thomson talks of a time when the supervisor took the football from the boys, so that they will play something else, but as a response, the boys continued playing football with a wallet and then with a stone, and when they were banned from playing ‘stone football’ they became really upset and even hostile.
- **Violent/aggressive play (“No fighting”):** Of course, we don’t want children to hurt each other, but sometimes it’s difficult for adults to see the difference between play-fighting, rough and tumble play and real fighting. These physical types of play are important for a number of reasons. Children tend to play-fight with friends rather than enemies, and the overall intention is to keep the play going rather than to win, and so punches are pulled and stronger children may self-handicap. They have been found to be a basis for peer attachments, and for ‘playing with’ strong emotions of fear and anger, supporting emotion regulation. Adults sometimes find it hard to differentiate play-fighting and real fighting, but it is much clearer to children themselves.
- **Good play (“They don’t know how to play”):** A sort of nostalgia can also guide adults’ attitudes towards children playing. We all have our own memories of playing, and often these lead us to feel that the ways we played are the best ways to play. So we introduce the games that we enjoyed so much, and expect children to enjoy them in the same way – and if they don’t, we might think they don’t know how to play anymore.
- **Regulation and resistance:** Despite these adult manifestations of power and control, Thomson found that children are not passive victims of this process. They sometimes ‘take the fight’, and try to control the scene in any ways they can, for example, by hiding behind a bush to do some forbidden activity. Adults are sometimes right when they feel that the children deliberately defying rules.

All these conscious or subconscious adult agendas have an impact on children’s free play. While it is natural that adults want to save children from harm and educate them, they should be conscious about how their interventions affect children and should be able to recognise when they are acting because of their own agendas. A continuous self-reflection is required from the adult to be able to support children’s self-directed play.

Regarding interventions, it is useful to go back to the Psycholudics (see Chapter 4, section 4.3.2) and understand how our actions support each element of the cycle. Sturrock and Else describe four different levels of interventions that are aimed at supporting the play cycle rather than terminating or changing it:

- **Play maintenance:** this is when children are playing and the adult is there with little or no direct involvement in the play except for observing what is happening. The playworker plays a watchful, protective role here, preventing unwanted interruption by others. At its best, the playing child or children will not even be aware of this level of intervention. A good example was seen at an after-school club where a playworker was playing a home-designed big game of snooker with the older children, and underneath the snooker table two five-year-olds

were playing ‘house’. Occasionally the playworker would gently touch the arm of the snooker players to warn them not to tread on the limbs of the players below that would sometimes stick out from underneath the table.

- **Simple involvement:** this is when the playworker acts as a resource for play. The playworker is aware of the play frame and responds to direct or indirect play cues by acting as a resource for the play. This could involve providing materials, a toy or some other hardware necessary to maintain the play frame and the loop and flow of the children’s play cycles. Once the required resources have been provided, the playworker withdraws. There is no involvement in the content or narrative of the play frame other than to supply the resources
- **Medial involvement:** this is when the playworker is cued (directly or indirectly) by the child to become involved in the play. The purpose of involvement is to establish or re-establish a play frame and again withdraw as soon as this is done, returning to play maintenance mode. This could be when the child offers you an imaginary sweets that they have made and cooked on their imaginary camp fire or you find yourself being dressed by a group of children to be their king, queen, baby or monster. This level of intervention is usually short-lived, sometimes almost immediate. With this level of intervention, the playworker must be aware that their adult presence in the play frame carries with it size, status and authority and could therefore easily dominate the frame rather than purely (re)establish it.
- **Complex involvement:** this is when the playworker is involved in the children’s play for a more extended period and without their involvement the play would break down. Again, this should be in response to issued cues (direct or indirect) and the playworker must be careful not to dominate the frame. Here the forms of play are shared between the playing adult and child/ren. As with medial intervention, the playworker must be aware of their power. Sturrock talks of the ‘witness position’ that playworkers should hold, where they are observing the play frame whilst at the same time being a part of it. The playworker needs to make complex judgement calls as to the direction and involvement in the material of the play frame. Pragmatically, in this situation the playworker has to balance his/her own involvement in the play with what else is going on at the play setting.

In addition to adult involvement directly in children’s play frames, there is an endless number of opportunities for intervening in order to support children’s play (not constrain it) in less direct ways. For example, this could be through rearranging the space, or offering a more diverse set of loose parts (see the example of the canoe in Chapter 6, section 6.4).

## 7.5 Navigating the tensions (Brawgs Continuum)

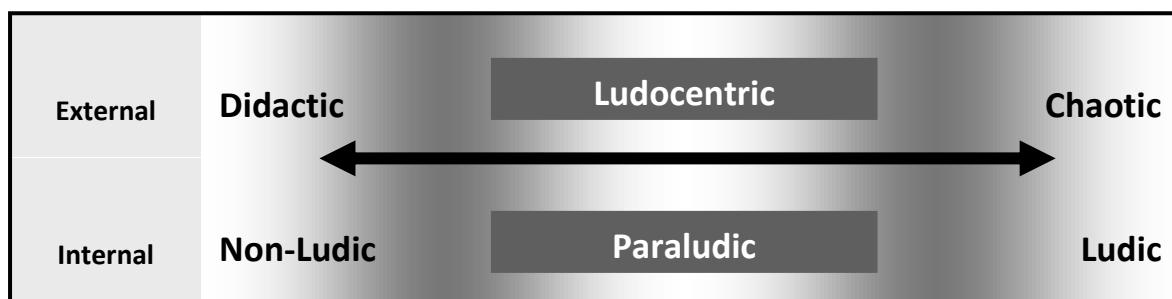
Brawgs Continuum<sup>73</sup> attempts to offer playworkers a way of navigating the tensions and contradictions that are thrown up by the low intervention-high response ethos, on the one hand reading ‘non-intervention’ literally (that is, that adults should just leave children to get on with it) and on the other the pressures on adults to direct and control children’s playing either towards socially desired outcomes or away from ways of playing that elicit discomfort or concern in the

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<sup>73</sup> Russell, W. (2006) *Reframing Playwork, Reframing Challenging Behaviour*, Nottingham: Nottingham City Council.

adults themselves. The model, developed collaboratively, is influenced by thinking both from psycholudics and complexity theory. Its name (Brawgs) is an anagram of the initials of the three main contributors (Wendy Russell, Gordon Sturrock and Arthur Battram). It suggests a dynamic continuum of internal (emotional, affective, motivational) and external (behavioural) responses to children's play. It assumes that:

playworkers will operate at different points along the continuum depending on a number of variables including context, personal beliefs and values, their relationship with individual children, their perception of the expectations of others, etc. ... [and that] playworkers should aim for the middle of the continuum as often as possible, recognising there will be times when they veer towards either end.<sup>74</sup>



Extreme positions in the external dimension are didactic, where the playworker directs and controls playing in order to help children learn, and chaotic, where the level of non-intervention is such that the space is not adequately resourced and responses to children's play are erratic and temperamental. In between these two extremes is a ludocentric approach that aims to support children's self-organised playing. Extreme positions in the internal dimension are non-ludic, where the desire to control, teach and protect children dominates, and ludic, where playworkers privilege their own emotional desires and unplayed out material. In between is a *paraludic* emotional state, where playworkers recognise the symbolic (rather than literal) material being expressed by children, are aware of their own unplayed out material and can therefore support this expression without adulteration.

This is a dynamic model: adults will feel themselves pulled to one end or the other and need to consciously reflect (both in action at the time and on action afterwards) to return towards the centre. Of course there will be times when didactic behaviour is appropriate; again, this should be within the overall aim of operating in an aligned but dynamic position of ludocentric and paraludic.

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<sup>74</sup> As above, pp.37.

## Chapter 8: Useful resources

We hope you have found this handbook useful. There are a number of references used, and we add to these here to offer links to online resources and to organisations who can help you to become a Play-friendly School. Bon voyage!

### 8.1 Useful websites and organisations

BaSiS (Breaktime and Social Life in Schools): a longitudinal research project in England:  
<http://www.breaktime.org.uk/index.html>

Bristol Scrapstore Playpods: <https://www.playpods.co.uk/>

Canadian Public Health Association Unstructured Play Project (lots of useful resources):  
<https://www.cpha.ca/unstructured-play>

Conceptual PlayWorld (resources for playful approaches to teaching STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) subjects: <https://www.monash.edu/conceptual-playworld/about#>

General Comment 17 on UNCRC article 31:

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fG%2f17&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fG%2f17&Lang=en)

Global Outdoor Classroom Day: <https://outdoorclassroomday.com/>

International Play Association (including links to country branches): <http://ipaworld.org/>

International School Grounds Association: <http://www.internationalschoolgrounds.org/>

Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL): <https://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk/>

Play Board Northern Ireland: <https://www.playboard.org/>

Play England: <http://www.playengland.org.uk/>

Play-friendly Schools: <http://www.playfriendlyschools.eu/>

Play Scotland: <https://www.playscotland.org/>

Play types: <https://playeverything.wordpress.com/play-and-playwork/play-types/>

Play Types Toolkit for schools (Play Scotland, 2019): <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Loose-Parts-Play-Toolkit-2019-web.pdf>

Play Wales (lots of useful information sheets): <http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/>

Unicef Rights Respecting Schools Award: <https://www.unicef.org/rights-respecting-schools/>

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### 8.3 Mapping the handbook contents to the Trainer's Guide

The Trainer's Guide can be found on the Play-friendly Schools website<sup>75</sup>. The 30-hour training course is structured in two parts, the first part aimed at a broader audience (those involved in strategic development as well as operational), with the second part revisiting the Quality Criteria for those who work with children at play – the operational aspects. The table below aims to show which sections of the workbook contain additional information and/or the theoretical elements of activities in the training course. Given the structure of the course, there is some repetition in the mapping. Generally, there is more detail in the second part, although trainers may wish to become familiar with the detail before delivering the first half of the course even if they don't use the material directly in sessions.

Training Course Module	Sections in handbook
Module 1: What is a Play-friendly School?	1.2: Why being a Play-friendly School matters 2: Country-specific information 3.2: The importance of a whole-school approach 4.2.2: A word on children's participation 6.3: Affordances 7.1: A whole-school approach: ongoing processes
Module 2: Making time and building a culture that supports play (1) – strategic/policy issues	1.2: Why being a Play-friendly School matters 2: Country-specific information 3.1: The importance of having both a strategy and an operations lead 4.1: The PARK framework for the written statement 4.2: Policy (including sub-sections) 4.3: Knowledge: thinking about play (including sub-sections, although much of the detail here is for Module 6) 4.4: Access 4.5: Risk 5.2: The importance of extended periods for playing 5.3: The importance of honouring times for play 5.4: Playful pedagogy and what it entails 5.5: Playful moments throughout the school day
Module 3: Making time and building a culture that supports play (1) – practice issues	1.2: Why being a Play-friendly School matters 1.3: The playwork ethos (including the Playwork Principles) 4.2.1: Who might stakeholders be? 5.1: General Comment 17 on article 31 of the UNCRC 6.4: The theory of loose parts 7: Parts of this chapter may be useful (mainly aimed at Module 8)

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.playfriendlyschools.eu/>

<b>Training Course Module</b>	<b>Sections in handbook</b>
Module 4: Space for play	6.1: Thinking about space 6.3: Affordances 6.5: IMEE and space auditing 6.6: Critical cartography (more for module 9) 6.7: Designing space: a rich play environment
Module 5: School strategy and action plan	This is a review module, using material covered to date to begin an action planning process. Different handbook sections may be useful here depending on the group
Module 6: More on play – perspectives on its nature and value	4.3: Knowledge: thinking about play (including sub-sections)
Module 7: The self – personal aspects of supporting play in schools	7.4: Intervention and adulteration
Module 8: Playwork theory and practice	1.3: The playwork ethos (including the Playwork Principles) 4.3.2: Looking at how play happens: play types, the play cycle
Module 9: More on play and space	The whole of chapter 6 4.2.2: A word on children's participation
Module 10: Play beyond play time / action planning	5.4: Playful pedagogy and what it entails 5.5: Playful moments throughout the school day

